Towards a Post-Heteronormative Society: Exploring the Interpretation and Negotiation of Gender Equity in the Uniform Policies of English Primary Schools.

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Abstract

This thesis brings the literature on uniform, gender equity and heteronormativity into conversation with the lived experiences of primary school staff and governors in England through a consideration of two research questions:

1. To what extent are school uniform policies compliant with the DfE School Uniform Guidance?

    1.1 Does the uniform policy specify different clothing for boys and girls?

    1.2 Are girls and LGBTQ+ pupils disadvantaged by the policy options they are given?

2. Can school uniform policies support gender equity?

    2.1 What explanations are given for the choice of current policy?

    2.2 How could the school adapt the policy to provide equal and appropriate provision for LGBTQ+ children?

    2.3 Are there any barriers to making these changes and how could these be overcome?

I draw on interviews with staff and governors at fifteen primary schools in Nottinghamshire to answer these questions. I argue that in its present format the DfE Guidance has had a limited impact on uniform equity. Nearly a decade since it was first published schools continue to maintain policies that do not account for cultural needs and have a huge financial impact on low-

income families. Furthermore, many only recognise the gender binary and have gender biased uniform specifications that disadvantage girls and LGBTQ+ children. This study makes an original contribution to current discourses about school uniform legislation through a consideration of the impact of school uniform policies on LGBTQ+ children. I assert that a primary factor contributing to the success or failure of schools to provide gender equity is awareness, not a lack of skill, time, or money. Neither legislation or funding currently protects LGBTQ+ children from experiencing less than equal provision within the English education system. I recommend that the Department of Education passes legislation requiring all schools in England to implement inclusive, non-prescriptive, gender-neutral school uniform policies.

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List of Terms and Abbreviations

Binary gender   Classification of gender into two distinct types either male or female

Cis   A person whose gender is the same as that assigned at birth

CPD   Continuing Professional Development

DCSF   Department for Children, Schools, and Families

DfE   Department for Education

DoH   Department of Health

HBT   Homophobic, Bi-phobic, and Transphobic

Heteronormativity   The worldview that promotes binary gender identity and heterosexual orientation as the normal and preferred ways of being

Heterosexual   A sexual orientation in which a man is attracted to a woman and vice versa

LGBTQ+   Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender and Queer, the + represents all other groups that do not identify as heterosexual including asexual, intersex and questioning

Non-binary	A person whose gender identity does not sit comfortably with either man or woman
Ofsted	The Office for Standards in Education
PE	Physical Education
RHSE	Religious, Health and Sex Education
RSE	Relationships and Sex Education
SENCO	Special Educational Needs Coordinator
SLT	Senior Leadership Team
TERF	Trans Exclusionary Feminist campaign groups
Trans	A person whose gender is not the same as that assigned at birth

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Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Aims and Overview of the Thesis

> "It isn't that they can't see the solution. It is that they can't see the problem." (Chesterton, 1935, p.32)

In this thesis I address an important gap in the literature by asking whether enough is being done to ensure existing school policies include LGBTQ+ people. In recent times school uniform policies have been widely debated with regard to equality for women and girls, and in terms of financial burden to low-income families (Mallen, 2021; Parliament, House of Lords, 2020; Reidy, 2021). However, in England no one has addressed the reasons for schools maintaining gender binary policies that marginalise LGBTQ+ identities. I argue that there is an urgent need for schools to recognise the mental and physical harm that is experienced by LGBTQ+ children when some identities are excluded from school narratives. Heteronormativity, which is understood in this thesis as the worldview that promotes binary gender identity and heterosexual orientation as the normal and preferred ways of being should not be an option when LGBTQ+ children are twice as likely to die by suicide (*Lancet*, 2019) and when 42% of Year 5 and 6 pupils in primary school say hurtful homophobic, bi-phobic, and transphobic bullying is prevalent in their school (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a). These figures suggest that children in the primary years of schooling experience anti-LGBTQ+ sentiment from both adults and other children. Therefore, schools need to consider the ways in

which they may be complicit in the reproduction of such narratives, particularly in the early years of education when children's expectations and world views are rapidly constructed (Warin and Adriany, 2017; Warin and Price, 2020). A recent systematic review of research across three continents found that one ally in one setting was enough to stop all forms of harm for any given child (Wilson and Cariola, 2020). Thus, schools are in a position to be allies to LGBTQ+ children. What is not currently clear is why schools have not chosen to move to gender-neutral policies that include LGBTQ+ identities given the social zeitgeist of the present day. This study makes an original contribution to knowledge by asking school personnel directly about how and by whom their policies were developed. It asks how they judge the impact of those policies on the children and families they serve. It explores gender binaries and whether they feel LGBTQ+ children are catered for. I also ask directly about their views regarding the inclusion of trans pupils. These questions seek to discover both whether the school has a gender-neutral policy and whether the existence of such a policy actually enables children to feel comfortable wearing any clothing. Analysing their responses will provide vital information about what and who is driving school uniform policy development and enactment and provide ideas about how this is, and may be, challenged.

Consequently, I address the following research questions:

1. To what extent are school uniform policies compliant with the DfE School Uniform Guidance?

    1.1 Does the uniform policy specify different clothing for boys and girls?

    1.2 Are girls and LGBTQ+ pupils disadvantaged by the policy options they are given?

2. Can school uniform policies support gender equity?

    2.1 What explanations are given for the choice of current policy?

    2.2 How could the school adapt the policy to provide equal and appropriate provision for LGBTQ+ children?

    2.3 Are there any barriers to making these changes and how could these be overcome?

I draw on interviews with 15 representatives from primary schools in Nottinghamshire to answer these questions. The group comprised new and experienced infant and junior teachers, head and deputy head teachers, school office managers, teaching assistants, SENCOs and church, academy trust and parent governors. The research is qualitative in nature and I adopt a semi-structured interview approach focusing on the lived experiences and perceptions of those involved. In order to critically engage with the testimonies of these personnel I employ Judith Butler's Queer Theory to examine the perceptions, beliefs and values that legitimise their actions.

1.2 Statement of subjectivity

It is important in any research project to situate oneself in relation to what and whom is being studied in order to clarify one's own relationship with the research and provide context for others to both understand the foundations upon which the research is built and evaluate the validity and authenticity of the work (Preissle, 2008). Consequently, it is important that I explain my own personal and professional history as relates to this research. Over the past two decades I have worked in a variety of roles, teaching and training in the education and fitness industries both in the UK and overseas. I have also spent a considerable amount of time volunteering with several charities supporting people in times of crisis and advocating for those who feel they are neither seen nor heard. This study arises from those experiences. First, I acknowledge that I cannot help but have an emotional reaction to reports involving self-harm and suicidality, particularly where those reports involve children. I have always chosen to be open about my own experiences with overcoming these issues as a result of living with Addison's Disease and Ehlers Danlos Syndrome because I feel that empathy and understanding exist in a place of honesty where individuals know that there is no shame in talking about their struggles. My work has shown me that children and young people, and equally adults, can find comfort in knowing that whilst others may not have experienced exactly the same struggles, it is ok not to be ok and to admit that. To see that "hope is real and change is possible" (Thornton, 2020). Thus, my view is biased in this regard. For me, working as an inclusion officer

and as a mental health advocate, has resulted in an enduring concern for the effectiveness of initiatives to reduce bullying, marginalisation and the incidence of self-harm and suicidality. When I see yet another situation that had the potential to be resolved my reaction is usually one of frustration. This frustration arises from my desire to somehow address some of the thoughts and worries that lead children towards self-harm and suicide. No child should ever feel that hurting themselves or ceasing to exist is the only way to escape the pain that they are experiencing. The complexities of reversing some of the situations that give rise to harm has become an interest of mine through my work in schools as a teacher and researcher and one of the situations that I heard about, and saw the effects of, time and time again was LGBTQ+ marginalisation. Through conversations with colleagues, both LGBTQ+ and non-LGBTQ+, I came to see that many people are simply unaware of the issues and their consequences, and that others are conflicted in their consideration of what action to take. I began to wonder about the practicalities of enacting change and the reasons behind the enduring status quo. Thus, given that during my time working in and with schools, there have been very few occasions where I encountered teachers who did not genuinely want the best for the children in their care, I began this study intrigued as to why change had not already occurred. To this end I admit that I could not help but feel discomfort when hearing some of the responses during the interview phase. I had to acknowledge that at times the data was showing that not all situations were positive and it was not unilaterally the case that institutions

would want to accommodate gender equity. Nevertheless, I am an experienced researcher who has worked on multiple quantitative and qualitative research projects over the years and I always seek to honour the ethical commitment to reflexivity in order to address the bias of my own worldview at all stages of the research process. Thus, I ensured that the interview schedule was carefully designed, reviewed by an ethics panel, pilot tested and refined prior to data generation. Additionally, I considered myself to be a research 'instrument' (Patton, 1990) making it important to share my background and motivation, as discussed in this chapter. It was also vital to recognise that as a cis (the same gender as assigned at birth) female, I needed to be acutely cognizant of the pervasive nature of cisnormativity. Neary (2021) suggests that cisnormativity can be impermeable to reflexivity but that employing queer theory within the research framework can facilitate a suitable level of interrogation of bias. Therefore, my research was designed in accordance with this warning. In addition, I took the opportunity to discuss the bracketing of personal biases, preconceptions, and assumptions with more experienced researchers within my research department. In the methodology chapter I have provided a detailed account of the decision-making processes undertaken. Of particular importance is the explanation of the sampling strategy and steps taken to ensure I did not wield power over the participants in ways which could affect either their responses or decision to participate. In addition, as further insurance against misappropriation of participant responses, I recorded each interview to allow for revisiting and checking of

individual testimonies. I believe that this, together with a transparent and detailed description of the analysis, and the use of illustrative extracts from participant testimonies throughout the work, show that the findings and conclusions reached are sustained by the data (Cohen et al., 2011; Silverman, 2006).

With this subjectivity in mind, the next section discusses the context of this study.

1.3 Context

The legacy of Section 28, a piece of legislation passed in May 1988 which prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality' by local authorities, and persistent heteronormativity, particularly amongst older generations and some faith communities, have combined to create an atmosphere of moral panic surrounding gender identity. Whilst such alarmist narratives are prevalent in the media, they have no place in schools (Allen et al, 2014; Lee, 2019). In a landmark speech that was shared across the world in 2016, musician and actor, Olly Alexander, told a crowd of over 200,000 people at Glastonbury that:

> "As queer adults we know what it is like to be scared and live with fear as part of our everyday" (Alexander, 2016).

In 2023, such fear, and its legitimate basis in a heteronormative society, is reported daily in the news. Many adults today, grew up in a time when being LGBTQ+ was illegal, others in a time where it was allowed but unseen with LGBTQ+ lifestyles and culture only being accepted if they were 'sanitised' to follow normative ideas of monogamy, marriage, and family life (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c; Ellis, 2007; Rasmussen, 2011). Indeed, the community has been, and felt marginalised and has disproportionately suffered from bullying and harassment, resulting in significantly higher levels of mental distress, self-harm, and suicide (*Stonewall*, 2017). LGBTQ+ people have had to fight just to have the same rights as everyone else. In response to protests and campaigns by both the community and its allies, and to LGBTQ+ people existing and refusing to be invisible, there has been change. Section 28 which described LGBTQ+ relationships as 'pretended' and prohibited the 'promotion of homosexuality' was repealed in 2003. In 2010, the Equality Act made it illegal to discriminate upon a person on the grounds of their age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage or civil partnership, pregnancy or maternity, race, religious belief, sex, gender, or sexual orientation. In 2014, same sex marriage became legal and, in 2019, LGBT+ inclusive relationships and sex education (RSE) became mandatory in primary and secondary schools (DfE, 2020b). In 2023, conversion therapy was finally outlawed. Thus, it could be said that the work for LGBTQ+ equality is done, but it is not. Whilst for those

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who are lesbian and gay, society is somewhat more accepting, reports of bullying in schools and on social media remain high. Equally, trans, and non-binary people continue to be cast as dangerous monsters by large swathes of the media, yet are statistically the most likely members of society to be the victims of harm (Bayrakdar and King, 2021).

On this basis, the research study presented here is important because LGBTQ+ children live in a society where being LGBTQ+ makes them a target. *Stonewall* reports that 45% of LGBTQ+ pupils, including 64% of trans pupils, have been bullied for being LGBTQ+ in school (*Stonewall*, 2017) and the *Educate and Celebrate Metro Youth Changes Survey* showed that most young LGBTQ+ people felt that their time in school had been affected by hostility or fear, with consequences such as feeling left out, lower grades and having to move schools (*Educate and Celebrate*, 2017). Rates of suicide and self-harm are also significantly higher amongst this group, with LGBTQ+ children twice as likely to die by suicide (D'Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger, 2001; *Lancet*, 2019). I argue that schools make this situation worse by maintaining gender binary school uniform policies that enforce, and thus perpetuate, heteronormativity. Indeed, a recent qualitative study into student and teacher perceptions of gender stereotypes in UK primary schools found that children are both consciously and unconsciously indoctrinated in a supposed 'right' way to be a boy or a girl from the earliest years of their

education (Gilchrist and Zhang, 2022). One of the many outcomes of gender stereotyping is that it makes some children feel like they do not belong, beginning a lifelong cycle of thoughts and worries about their own identity. Another is that for those who feel a disconnect between heteronormative expectations and their own preferences, the current system in many schools where the requirements of equality legislation are met by the school allowing parents or carers to request a variation for their child serves only to make the child obviously different, and their family a target for criticism (Neary and Cross, 2018; Rahilly, 2015).

Indeed, such targeting of LGBTQ+ children in terms of bullying, and of their parents in terms of accusations of abuse and wokeness, has been documented by multiple studies and media narratives (Neary 2021; Warin and Price, 2020). In the past, approaches to dealing with this situation have focused on silencing the bullies. In fact, eight separate initiatives were funded with a two-million-pound grant from the UK government in 2014 (*NatCen*, 2016). Furthermore, every school is required to have an equality policy and a bullying policy which specify the range of actions they take to prevent these occurrences. Yet in 2021, homophobic, bi-phobic, and transphobic bullying was reported by pupils at almost the same level as in 2017. Moreover, 53% of children surveyed in school in 2021 said that LGBTQ+ children would not feel safe in their school (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a; *Stonewall*, 2017). The

government meanwhile either believes that the work is done or recognises the inadequacy of the approach because in March 2020 funding for LGBTQ+ specific anti-bullying projects in English schools was withdrawn (Heah, 2021). These findings generate another argument for the implementation of gender-neutral uniform policy legislation: it does not require investment yet supports LGBTQ+ anti-bullying whilst also benefitting the mental health of all children because it moves towards the elimination of gender-based stereotypes and their attendant limitations, instead accentuating the accessibility of difference (Martino and Cummings-Potvin, 2016).

The link between school uniform and mental health is important because unlike LGBTQ+ bullying, child mental health is a current government priority (DfE, 2021a). Both quantitative and qualitative evidence now exist charting the epidemic of mental distress amongst children (*Health and Social Care Information Centre*, 2020). The negative, sometimes tragic, consequences of this in both the short and long term for individuals, and perhaps importantly given the nature of political responsiveness, for our western neoliberal capitalist society, are undeniable (*UNICEF*, 2019; *Young Minds*, 2021). Since 2021 new funding and initiatives focused on mental health for all children both in and out of school have been developed (DfE, 2021a) and as of 2023 continue to be discussed at the highest level of government despite limited actualisation for pupils in real terms. Whilst the initiatives outline vital service

capabilities with plans to put counsellors in schools, raise awareness amongst parents and teachers and introduce mental wellbeing as part of the RHSE curriculum, these all take a considerable amount of time and money to accomplish. Furthermore, for those who are struggling because they are LGBTQ+ the outlined initiatives will not directly stop the source of their trauma. Learning coping strategies and positive self-image may help overcome the impact of the situation on their lives but that does not mean the experiences are erased. I argue that taking steps to eliminate heteronormativity and the constructs that perpetuate it amongst children would help more children immediately without significant cost or time implications for the government or schools. This will absolutely not change heteronormativity in school overnight, nor will it magically alter the attitudes of staff, governors, parents, or pupils. However, it does make an instant change to the understanding of what clothing is acceptable for whom (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a; Martino and Cummings-Potvin, 2016; Wilson and Cariola, 2020). Making all uniform policies gender-neutral so that anyone can wear anything means that staff and parents can address incidents where children are told otherwise, be that by children or adults. It would make schools allies to trans and non-binary children because a child who is questioning no longer needs to ask for a variation, and their family do not have to defend their choices to the school governing body (Mallen, 2021; Neary and Cross, 2018). It would make schools allies to lesbian and gay children who were bullied for being tomboys or effeminate (Paechter, 2010; Renold et al, 2017). I assert

that at a time when LGBTQ+ awareness is growing because of the new RSE

curriculum the additional legislation I advocate for, would make a difference.

The lack of teacher knowledge surrounding LGBTQ+ identities has recently

become more noticeable because the new RSE framework makes it

compulsory for teachers to affirm and validate LGBT identity, teaching

acceptance with no exceptions (DfE, 2020b). Yet, 8 in 10 teachers claim that

they do not have enough knowledge to effectively implement the framework

(Heah, 2021). This echoes previous studies that showed that whilst the

overwhelming majority of teachers feel that they have an obligation to ensure

safe and supportive learning environments for LGBTQ pupils this does not

always translate into action. Indeed, only half of teachers' report having

engaged in any LGBTQ supportive practices, with only 67% indicating that

they challenge HBT language when they hear it and a mere 35% reporting

that they knew how to support LGBTQ+ pupils in their school (*Diversity Role

Models*, 2021a; *GLSEN*, 2017). There could be many reasons for this. As

previously discussed, the heteronormativity that continues to exist in schools

may be a result of the inadequacy of sexuality education, absence of openly

LGBTQ+ role models and the after effects of Section 28 amongst older

generations (Ellis, 2007; Lee, 2019). Many teachers and governors continue

to be from these generations although with every year that passes this

reduces. Still, the widening acceptance of gender and sexual diversity in

society more generally, means that more people are 'out' and the majority of people will know and interact with people who are LGBTQ+ (DePalma and Jennett, 2010). This suggests that it is heteronormative privilege that teachers in general are unaware of (Lee, 2019; Potvin, 2016). That said, many LGBTQ+ teachers report that they are concerned about being discriminated against if they are open about their sexual identity at school (Lee, 2019) and the negative experiences of schools involved in the *No Outsiders project* have been widely documented (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b; Moffat, 2020). The prevailing government has not, however, offered a solution, merely providing schools with more flexibility in implementing the new requirements. Ofsted changed the guidance from "schools will be downgraded" if the new RSE guidance is not implemented, to "schools will pass if they have consulted parents on the matter" (Ofsted, 2021). Thus, enabling schools to be sent right back to the situation that occurred with the original *No Outsiders project* when parents and activists protested outside schools about teaching diverse identities (including but not limited to LGBTQ+ identities), claiming immorality, lack of respect for religious beliefs and the sexualisation of children. This ultimately led to the *No Outsiders research project* being halted (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b; Moffat, 2020). In that case, the spectres of heteronormativity, bigotry and religion reared up and used their power to stop LGBTQ+ identities from being included in the curriculum, and they can equally be used to exclude LGBTQ+ identities in uniform policies. The backtracking of

Ofsted regarding the implementation of the RSE curriculum enables this to continue.

It is therefore perhaps important to note that it is not only LGBTQ+ pupils who find uniform policies problematic. Policies have also been shown to ignore cultural needs, engender greater economic hardship for some families, and sexualise young girls. A comprehensive global review of research into the educational and health impacts of school uniform, published in 2021, identified the need for objective and subjective studies into how school uniform policies are developed and the health and psycho-social impacts of their design and policy on each of these grounds (Reidy, 2021). In this respect, as of 2023, the issue of financial burden on low-income families has been proven to the extent that the Education (Guidance about Costs of School Uniforms) Act, first brought to the House of Lords in 2020 was enacted in November 2021. All schools were expected to have implemented it, amending their school uniform policies accordingly by September 2022. Regarding the other areas highlighted by the Reidy review (2021), the charitable organisation *Let Clothes Be Clothes*, have taken up the challenge of furthering the uniform legislation with respect to inequalities experienced by girls through a research study in collaboration with the Department for Education (Mallen, 2021). However, other areas have seen little new research at the time of writing. The inequalities experienced by children from ethnic and

religious minority groups remain under-researched as do those of other marginalised groups. I now seek to address the research gap for LGBTQ+ pupils. In this thesis I explore the who, the how and the why of school uniform policymaking in an effort to understand why, in the absence of a legal mandate, some schools have moved to gender-neural policies and others have not. I suggest that furthering school uniform legislation to include compulsory gender-neutral policymaking is the way forward. It would be a preventative action because if there are no lines drawn amongst children regarding gender identity, if they are not made to enact masculinities and femininities and name them as such through the styling of their bodies in heteronormatively gendered items of clothing that comprises their school uniform, then every child has a choice about who they are and who they want to be. Homophobic and transphobic bullying on the grounds of how someone looks is forestalled because if there is not a gendered way to dress then no one can be seen to be dressing differently. Heteronormative hegemony and its attendant inequalities are not perpetuated. Thus, education provides a giant step towards a post-heteronormative society in which everyone is seen and included. This study will help to determine what is needed to implement change.

1.4 Thesis Outline

The thesis is split into seven chapters:

Chapter two reviews the existing research relating to the key foci of this study, school uniform, LGBTQ+ inclusion and heteronormativity. I draw on policy documents, academic literature, and reports from the charity sector to demonstrate that the lack of research around LGBTQ+ identities in school uniform policies is an important gap that needs to be filled. Within this discussion I address popularly held notions of the benefits of uniform and look at evidence showing that intersectional discrimination has long been perceived in this area. I move on to specific concerns relating to the impact of visibility and acceptance on the mental and physical health of LGBTQ+ children in childhood and beyond. Finally, I look at how wider society influences all aspects of school life and how school structures such as policies and curricula can support the development of a post-heteronormative society.

Chapter three explains how I have employed Judith Butler's Queer Theory to provide insights into the heteronormativity in school uniform policymaking and enforcement. I use the concept of heterosexual hegemony to explore the words and actions of the interviewees and show how these can affect the developing worldview of all children. I also draw upon the concept of performativity, which Butler uses to name the repetitive 'doing' of gender by

children in response to the requirements of the school. I use this concept to explain why the enactment of uniform policy denies some LGBTQ+ identities and removes children's power.

Chapter four discusses the methodological framework I employed in this research. It explains why a qualitative approach was taken and why semi-structured interviews were felt to be the most suitable method for exploring the negotiation and interpretation of gender equity in school uniform policy development and enactment. I discuss my epistemological and ontological position discussing the role of perception in this type of research before moving on to outline the ethical considerations that were taken into account both prior to and during the research. Following this, I set out my chosen sampling strategy and discuss the participants recruited. I go on to describe the pilot study and the changes that arose from it, before reflecting on the data generation phase and explaining how the data generated was analysed using queer theory informed thematic analysis.

Chapter five explores my analysis. I examine each of seven emergent themes through the lens of queer theory as explained in the theoretical framework chapter. This lens enables me to examine the narratives of the school representatives, revealing both the implicit and explicit heteronormativity of the views, policies, and practices that they have. This analysis highlights the disparity between espoused commitments to equality and the lived

experiences of these school staff and governors and discusses the implications for LGBTQ+ children.

Chapter six links the findings of the analysis back to the aims of this thesis discussing the importance of gender equity in school uniform policymaking in primary schools. Returning to the research questions it argues that the heteronormative thinking of school staff and governors, infiltrates policymaking. This marginalises LGBTQ+ children by only allowing some identities to exist and reproduces heteronormativity amongst pupils laying the foundations for homophobic, bi-phobic, and transphobic bullying. Finally, it explores how this is, and may be, challenged in the primary school setting.

Chapter seven draws the thesis to a close. I restate the main findings of the study before outlining the implications both for government policy and for schools in terms of practice. I move on to discuss the limitations of this research and identify areas which need further research. My closing comments summarise the achievements of this thesis and result in a call to action for the prevailing government.

Chapter 2: Why is School Uniform Policy Instrumental to LGBTQ+ Equality?

2.1 Introduction

In order to situate this research and understand why it is important to interrogate the ways in which gender equity is interpreted and negotiated in school uniform policies, I first review the existing research. In this thesis I find that whilst there is evidence of heteronormative hegemony with regards to curricula, and evidence of a mental health crisis particularly amongst LGBTQ+ children, there is a paucity of research showing how schools act on this information to create meaningful change and become allies to LGBTQ+ pupils. In this regard, the thesis provides important insights into the impact of teachers' and governors' own worldviews on the policies schools create and enact. The aim of this work is to understand why some schools perpetuate heteronormativity in their policies and practices and find out what could be done to change this. Ultimately it intends to find solutions to some of the issues so that moving forward LGBTQ+ identities cease to be marginalised and all children feel safe and included in school. However, I recognise that LGBTQ+ inclusive education is much more complex than just a uniform policy. It is also much more than just an RSE curriculum. It is vital to consider all aspects of school life and their impact on pupils. Thus, this research concentrates on the potential of uniform.

Consequently, this literature review engages with four core questions. Firstly, 'Why is uniform important to schools?' This section discusses popularly held notions of the benefits of uniform and the research previously carried out in relation to these claims. Secondly, 'How can a lack of equity in uniform disadvantage some groups of pupils?' This section looks at research evidence showing that intersectional discrimination has long been perceived in relation to uniform, reviewing campaigns relating to the impact on girls and low-income families inter alia. Thirdly, 'Why is a lack of uniform equity particularly harmful to LGBTQ+ children?' This section looks at specific concerns relating to children's developing concept of self in the primary years and the impact of visibility and acceptance on mental and physical health in childhood and beyond. Finally, 'How does school uniform impact on society, and society impact on school uniform?' This final section takes a wider look at heteronormativity in society to situate the arguments surrounding gender identity in school within the wider social context.

2.2 Why is uniform important to schools?

My research focuses on the impact of primary school uniform policies on LGBTQ+ children. However, before discussing the impact of school uniform on any individual or group it is necessary to understand why school uniform is believed to be so important. School uniform is considered worldwide as symbol of Britishness with a tradition dating back centuries. Its history is

inextricably bound up with issues of class, societal norms, gender norms, nationalism, and colonialism (Stephenson, 2021). Educational institutions devised and regulated clothing in order to communicate their vision of the ideal pupil, to ensure that pupils knew their place in society and to delineate institutional status. Such powerful drivers ensured its adoption and diffusion, leading to a situation in which most people who grew up in Britain will have experienced this form of codified dressing at some point during their childhood. Furthermore, uniform remains a ubiquitous feature of school life today. It is a popularly held notion that it creates a sense of belonging amongst the pupil body, reinforces discipline and contributes to academic success. Indeed, the government presents the following benefits of uniform to schools:

> "Promotes a sense of pride in the school; Encourages a sense of community and belonging towards the school; Is practical and smart; Prevents children from coming to school in clothes that could be distracting in class; Makes children feel equal to their peers in terms of appearance; Is regarded as suitable wear for school and good value for money by most parents; Is designed with health and safety in mind" (DCSF, 2010, p.1)

Many of these claims are contestable and it is notable that in global analyses countries that do not have a tradition of uniform have comparable academic outcomes and children's behaviour is not seen to be any less in those places

(Reidy, 2021). Furthermore, in its present form there is no empirical evidence that uniform enhances a sense of belonging amongst pupils as claimed. Since belonging can be both inclusive, encouraging access, or exclusive, creating barriers to access, homogeneity does not automatically create equality or outweigh the impact of drawing lines between people. Rather, it has been suggested that uniform may instead provide children with a warped delineation of who is and is not worthy of privilege (Roffey, 2013). In a recent global review of research evidence was found to suggest that uniform has a direct impact on physical and psychological health, with girls, ethnic and religious minorities, LGBTQ+ children, and those from low-income families disproportionately suffering the negative consequences of uniform policies that do not suit their physical and socio-cultural needs (Reidy, 2021).

Nevertheless, at present there "is no legislation in place that deals specifically with school uniform or other aspects of appearance" (DfE, 2013, p.3) in England. However, whilst each school has its own policy it is noticeable that the uniforms are largely generic with 'school dresses' 'school trousers' and 'school shoes' being available to buy in multiple outlets from multinationals to independent suppliers nationwide. In the case of many schools the only discernible feature of their uniform versus that of another school is the chosen colour scheme and even then, it is likely that numerous other schools have the same. As a result, children rarely have a choice about the uniform they

must wear to school. This can lead to many types of conflict, even, although less commonly, in the primary school years. Arguments about types of shoes, hairstyles, skirt length, accessories and even coats are frequently reported in the media. Schools get labelled as 'draconian' and some pupils refuse to wear uniform at all (Kozma, 2014; Dobozy, 2015; Perkins, 2017). This subversion of policy could be viewed as individuals' attempts to express their own identity. This is important because it must be recognised that there exists legislation giving all children the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, which must be seen to include their personal identity (United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, 1989; Equality Act, 2010). However, school uniform policies rarely allow for this, rather valorising homogeneity and imposing an idealised vision of the perfect pupil that ignores all but existing sociological norms. This raises the question of whether less prescriptive and more inclusive policies would be better received by all and lead to a reduction in individuals' need to flout them.

It is noticeable then, that whilst the government in England does not stipulate the type of uniform policy that any school has, in Wales, schools are required by law to have gender-neutral non-prescriptive uniform and appearance policies (Addysg Cymru, 2019). This is interesting because the Welsh Government feels that there is sufficient evidence to support the need for legislation to ensure schools have inclusive uniform policies that do not

marginalise some gender identities, racial groups, or delineate people using constructs of class. Thus, allowing children freedom of expression in the intended spirit of rights legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989). In contrast, the guidelines published by the Department for Education (2013) serve only to inform staff and governing bodies about the legislative responsibility not to discriminate either directly or indirectly against any person or group on the grounds of gender, race, sexual orientation or religion in the negotiation and development of their individual school uniform policy. There is no stipulation as to how this should be ensured. As a result, policies often use legislative loop holes such as allowing an individual child a variation to meet the legislative requirement whilst maintaining a restrictive and exclusionary policy for all other pupils. That said, variation itself can be problematic. Parents taking part in *Let Clothes Be Clothes* study for the Department of Education told researchers that they felt that if they raised concerns about school uniform those concerns would be treated as too subjective to warrant action. Parents also said they were unsure of the system for making requests and fearful of having to make a case to the governing body (Mallen, 2021). This means that children have no choice and there is clear evidence that they resent the contradictory encouragement they receive from their schools to 'be themselves' whilst also being forced to 'be like everyone else' (Renold, 2013, p.12).

As previously mentioned, most school uniforms are made up of the same generic items and look almost identical. If the school logos were removed and the children all stood in a line it would be almost impossible to tell that they attended different schools. Yet, within each school the uniform is supposedly negotiated by school leaders and the governing body, ideally having surveyed the views of other school staff, pupils, and parents. It is therefore usually claimed that the adopted policy is an accurate representation of the views of all stakeholders. However, group decision making is sensitive to many heuristics (Sunstein and Hastie, 2014). Polarisation, groupthink, consensus forming, and satisficing, can all mean that the resultant policy is not representative of the range of views nor all available options. Rather, the resultant policy is an adoption of the easiest decision because the group focuses on what everyone knows already, or the views of those who are most powerful. This represents a significant issue because heteronormativity, racism and other forms of exclusion are endemic in society. Therefore, it is perfectly possible that decision makers are unaware of the implications of not having a gender-neutral policy for girls (Happel, 2013; Mallen, 2021) and LGBTQ+ children; of the impact of a hair-policy on Black pupils (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018); or the upset caused by a refusal to allow children to wear a hijab or adhere to other religious or cultural expectations for dress (Kiliç, Saharso and Sauer, 2008; Reidy, 2021). Single individuals may be aware of the issues but may have no power in the group and the group may not realistically appraise any alternative course of action (Janis, 1982).

These are all known issues of group decision-making and without clear legislation to guide the outcomes, these groups, which consist of people who cannot be expected to be experts in either garment design and selection or policy development, will make judgments based only on their own worldview. As those most likely to be affected by the negative implications of these decisions are minority groups with less representatives on the panels, the decisions made will not always be inclusive (Reidy, 2021). Most pertinent to my research is the fact that the current DfE guidance allows schools to maintain gender binary uniform policies, although I also believe that all aspects of school uniform that serve to marginalise minority groups in school are deserving of further investigation.

2.3 How can a lack of equity in uniform disadvantage some groups of pupils?

My research focuses on the impact of school uniform policies on children who identify, and those who go on to identify, as LGBTQ+. However, there is already evidence of the negative impact of uniform on a number of other minority groups and there have already been calls for the government to update their guidance to take into account those needs (Heah, 2021). No child should feel disadvantaged by the choices they have nor should they have to hide or change who they are to be accepted. Yet, school uniform forces children to embody and envisage ideas about their personhood, and at times,

even reject the dress codes of their cultural heritage or religious community in line with the image of the ideal pupil inhabiting the minds of policy makers.

Concerns have been raised surrounding the inadequacy of school uniform policies in relation to equality for girls, accommodation for religious needs and, amongst secondary school pupils, gender norms. However, by far the largest body of research regarding the inadequacy of uniform is in regard to mitigating the effects of poverty. This is both interesting and important. It is interesting because school uniforms were originally imposed in the fifteenth century by charity schools with a dual purpose of ensuring children were suitably clothed for school whilst simultaneously being "designed to inculcate children with humility and demonstrate their lowly status" (Stephenson, 2021, p.14). Over time this reversed and uniform became a symbol of the middle and upper classes with the styles of uniform changing to the formal style of shirt, tie and blazer, school trouser for boys and pinafore or skirt for girls, and to all schools adopting them as a sign of perceived betterment. Of course, this has also led to ever increasing costs for parents and what began as a way to support those in financial difficulty (albeit whilst ensuring they did not achieve parity of status) has become a huge financial burden for families. The fact that there is a large body of evidence demonstrating this impact is important because it has led to the government legislating on uniform costs. A new Education (Guidance on the Costs of School Uniform) Bill was brought to the

House of Commons by Mike Amesbury MP and passed into law in 2021 with implementation due in all schools by September 2022. This is in direct contrast to other bills such as that raised by Layla Moran MP in the House of Commons regarding gender equity (Parliament. House of Commons, 2019) because as this bill was never passed into law the issue of gender-neutral uniform was not included in the new legislation, nor was any guidance relating to race. This raises the question of whether if greater research evidence was available the government would feel obliged to legislate further on the matter. It is within this space that my research exists.

I, however, am not the only researcher to take up the challenge. *World Afro Day* undertook a study with *De Montford University* in 2019 to assess the impact of hair policies on Black children. Their report shows one in four children reported bad experiences at school related to their hair and the group also recorded numerous cases of children who tried to change their natural hair to look straighter, smaller, and more Caucasian (De Leon and Chikwendu, 2019). These findings align with those of Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly's (2018) review of research literature which found that schools with 'strict' uniform policies do not allow haircuts schools considered 'extreme' such as shaved patterns, non-natural colours, and dreadlocks. As these researchers pointed out, this shows a lack of understanding of the racial and cultural significance of hair and operates to construct hairstyles as dangerous,

distracting and a threat to control. Thus, whilst hair regulation is set out to appear as universalistic and therefore unproblematic, it is in fact both racist and classist (Joseph-Salisbury and Connelly, 2018).

Similarly, the charity *Let Clothes Be Clothes* undertook a study in association with the Department for Education in 2021 to assess the impact of uniforms on girls. Their findings echo the work of gender and sexuality researchers Happel (2013) and Bragg et al (2018), who found that girls felt that they were disadvantaged by the options they were given. Nevertheless, outside of the research space, gender equality for girls is perceived to have been achieved and the legal requirements met through schools altering their gender binary policies to say girls may wear trousers. This is acceptable in law because the definition of gender equality states girls and boys should enjoy the same opportunities, not that they should be the same or be treated exactly the same (*UNICEF*, 2011). Clearly, in some ways the addition of trousers does support the rights of girls. They do have a choice. However, it does not resolve the gender norms and stereotypes associated with that clothing. School is effectively forcing children to perform gender according to heterosexist gender rules that already exist in society regarding what it is to be feminine, masculine or neither and removing the opportunity for exploration (Renold et al, 2017; Warin and Price, 2020). Additionally, research has shown that children aged just 10-12 years old identify the sexist and heterosexist nature

of their school uniform noting the ways in which girls in particular would be labelled tomboys or girly-girls depending on their clothing choices and attractiveness to the 'opposite' sex. They also pointed out that uniform valorised a particular body shape. Children with a higher body mass often found the uniform uncomfortable and embarrassing, particularly 'girl' uniform items which tend to be figure hugging unlike the looser 'boy' options (Paechter, 2010; Renold et al, 2017). Moreover, recently, there have been multiple media storms surrounding schools who told girls as young as three to wear shorts under their skirts for modesty, and schools who told teenage girls not to wear tight or short clothing that would distract their male classmates and male teachers (Weale, 2021). This blatant victim blaming fails to recognise that the issue is with the way those men view women and girls. Telling girls to cover up perpetuates toxic gender stereotypes, body shaming the girls rather than addressing the issue of society's sexualisation of the female body (Happel, 2013). Furthermore, there was no evidence of any of these restrictions on boys' uniform (Reidy, 2021). Whilst these narratives have captured the attention of the media and feminists are still fighting for change, it has not been forthcoming. I argue in this thesis that the same issues affect LGBTQ+ children when schools claim to meet these same legislative requirements for gender non-discrimination through the option to request a variation. These schools claim equality but do not provide equity and this approach has serious implications for the mental wellbeing of children who have their feelings and opinions overruled and learn that they will not be

listened to (DePalma and Atkinson, 2010; Lansdown, 2005). In the next section I address the harm of this approach to LGBTQ+ children.

2.4 Why is a lack of uniform equity particularly harmful to LGBTQ+ children?

In the previous section I discussed the difference between gender equality and gender equity in uniform policymaking and touched upon schools using the possibility of requesting a variation to meet their legal responsibilities. I argue that this is a harmful method of including LGBTQ+ identities because research already exists that shows that when a child is granted a variation it makes them stand out, become more of a target (Neary and Cross, 2018; Rahilly, 2015), be faced with coming out when they might not be ready (Rivers, 2001) and, makes them feel like they do not belong (*Educate and Celebrate*, 2017). This leads to bullying and mental distress, particularly for gender-diverse pupils (Jones et al, 2016; Rivers and Duncan, 2013). This can have tragic and long-lasting consequences. Indeed, there exists evidence of LGBTQ+ children being twice as likely to die by suicide and four times as likely to self-harm (D'Augelli, Pilkington and Hershberger, 2001; *Lancet*, 2019). Furthermore, a recent study found that 53% of children said LGBTQ+ pupils would not feel safe at their school (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a).

Children should never be put in the uncomfortable position of entering spaces that are, or appear to be, unsafe for them to learn, interact and share in. They should never be made to feel that they should endure such feelings or that they should lose or change a part of themselves in order to belong. Yet 42% of Year 5 and 6 pupils say hurtful homophobic and transphobic bullying is prevalent in their school and 45% of LGBTQ+ pupils, including 64% of trans pupils, report that they have been bullied for being LGBTQ+ (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a; *Educate and Celebrate*, 2017; *Stonewall*, 2017). Allowing such a lack of acceptance has tragic and long-lasting consequences because children who receive the message that to be the same is 'normal' and anything else is 'wrong' come to believe that they should be ashamed to be different (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a, Heah, 2021; *Young Minds*, 2021). This shame can lead to lifelong fear, anxiety and depression for children who are already feeling unsure and alone:

> "He's seven years old in the playground when they tell him he's different. 12 years old when he finds out why: fag, puff, queer, sick, just some of the words that will sting in his ear for the rest of his life."
> (Khalaf, 2015)

Stonewall (2017) and *Diversity Role Models* (2021a) both report that almost half of LGBTQ+ pupils who face bullying do not tell anyone. They withdraw, become more isolated and have no idea how to escape the constant feeling of rejection:

"You cannot underestimate shame, the moment it kind of creeps into your life at a really young age, for young LGBT people, the moment that you realise you're different to everybody else, that just plants the seed of toxic pain and it just grows and grows and grows and then it just gets larger and larger as you grow older and I think that has a huge impact…I left school 10 years ago now and I doubt the effects will ever leave me" (Alexander, 2017)

During the last decade approaches to dealing with this situation have focused on silencing the bullies. Indeed, eight separate initiatives were funded with a two-million-pound grant from the UK Government in 2014 (*NatCen*, 2016). However, in March 2020, funding for LGBTQ+ anti-bullying projects in English schools was withdrawn (Heah, 2021). Instead, the Department for Education awarded £750,000 for anti-bullying projects to three non-LGBTQ+ specific organisations. This could be seen as deprioritising LGBTQ+ concerns at a time when 8 in 10 primary school teachers still say that they do not feel they have enough knowledge to effectively implement new RSE framework which demands the teaching of acceptance for LGBTQ+ and other identities with no exceptions (DfE, 2020b; *Diversity Role Models*, 2021a). Indeed, currently whilst the overwhelming majority of teachers say that they feel they have an obligation to ensure safe and supportive learning environments for LGBTQ pupils, only half report having engaged in any LGBTQ supportive practices. 67% say they challenge HBT language when they hear it, and a mere 35% report that they know how to support LGBTQ+ pupils in their school (*Diversity*

Role Models, 2021a, *GLSEN*, 2017). This would certainly indicate that current interventions are not efficacious. Either way, it must be noted that child and adolescent mental health in general is a current government priority (DfE, 2021a). Both quantitative and qualitative evidence now exist charting the epidemic of mental distress amongst children and young people (*Health and Social Care Information Centre*, 2020). Furthermore, the negative, sometimes tragic, consequences of this distress in both the short and long term for individuals and, perhaps importantly given the nature of political responsiveness, for our western neoliberal capitalist society, are now undeniable (*UNICEF*, 2019; *Young Minds* 2021). This means that there is potential to leverage the government's desire to be seen to act on child mental health through presenting evidence of the harms of school uniform to girls and LGBTQ+ children. Particularly as changing uniform legislation is not costly for the government nor for individual schools or families, it does not take a lot of time and has an immediate, as well as long-term impact. Gender-neutral school uniform would not, of course, remove heteronormative thinking immediately, nor remove all homophobic and transphobic bullying. However, it would stop a non-binary child from having to convince an adult to fight for them to wear the items of clothes they felt most comfortable in. This is important because in 2020, a systematic review of LGBTQ+ youth mental health across three continents found that the presence of one ally in one setting was instrumental in all cases of removing or minimising all forms of self-harm (Wilson and Cariola, 2020). This means the potential for schools to

be allies to LGBTQ+ children is enormous. I argue that having a gender-neutral school uniform policy which enables all children to feel included, with peers who are taught that it is more than ok to be yourself, and with teachers who support children's right to choose, would make a huge difference. It would also be a step towards creating a post-heteronormative society.

It is to this impact on wider society that I now turn.

2.5 How does school uniform impact on society, and society impact on school uniform?

In the previous section I suggested that gender-neutral policymaking would support LGBTQ+ children and wider society through the deconstruction of gender norms. As discussed in Stephenson's seminal work, A Cultural History of School Uniform (Stephenson, 2021), fashion has played an important role in embodying cultural norms throughout history and school uniform has both been influenced by and itself influenced the ways in which individuals were able to communicate their identity through clothing. In particular, school uniforms have perpetuated cultures of masculinity related to strength and power, valorised white-collar professions and associated clothing styles, and perpetuated gender norms particularly in respect of the post-war ideologies of manly men and girly girls. Yet they also, in earlier times, gave girls opportunities to transgress boundaries and partake in activities otherwise

unattainable for them as uniform was often less restrictive than clothing worn by women generally (Stephenson, 2021). This demonstrates the power of uniform and supports Butler's (2015) assertion that 'correct' clothing is only a matter of perception and that if attitudes change then everything changes. Yet, whilst exploration of the past helps explain the uniform regulations of the present, it does not condone them, or insist on their continuation. It is notable that school uniform in media, for example television programmes, is used in its most traditional and recognisable form (shirt, tie, 'school' trousers, skirts, and blazers) to portray the 'good' and the 'bad' through which items are worn and how emphasizing the cultural expectations that have been inscribed by uniform and affect perception of a person's character. Furthermore, as Stephenson (2021) points out, music videos, films, social media, and fancy dress also use school uniform in its most gendered, regulated, and recognisable, yet sexualised form as a costume, emphasising its equally problematic attributes. Yet, looking more widely, subcultures of the present day have taken apart the idea of the iron man and the pretty woman in fashion to invite more fluid and deregulated ways of dressing. Amongst younger generations, styles of dress and targeted popular culture, for example music and film, embodiment of personal identity is less restricted to the gender codes of the past. Furthermore, the major fashion houses of today seek change to the same extent as those who extoll the virtues of post-heteronormativity for a more egalitarian society:

"[it is] …an emotionally rational and rationally emotional rumination regarding what gender is and does inciting a genuine disregard for the gender connotations and constraints of the past, acknowledging that many barriers have fallen regarding how a man [or woman] should feel and look, and to a resignification of gender codes" (Maison Valentino, 2023).

Thus, it is my assertion that society does seek change and that just as in the past fashion and school uniform perpetuated ideas of masculinity and femininity, they can now help to deconstruct them.

Research evidence already exists to suggest that children's sense of self and their ideas about what is 'right' and 'wrong' develop at an early age and that this can lead children to put restrictions on themselves and others (Warin and Adriany, 2017; Wingrave, 2016). Therefore, it is important to look at the influence gendered policies have on children from a young age and I argue that school uniform in the primary school years when children are exploring their sense of self, can have a major impact. There already exists vast quantities of research evidence on the impact of schooling on children, which is not surprising given, that after the home, school is the environment where most children spend the majority of their time. School thus has the potential to strongly influence the outcomes for any child. I discussed earlier in this section the impact on LGBTQ+ children, but it is important to note that this

work has implications for all children (Warin and Price, 2020). When children see in their school that it is possible to be yourself and that being uniquely you is fully accepted then lines are not drawn between people. In wider society, this is not the case lines are frequently drawn, particularly against those who identify as LGBTQ+. Heteronormativity, the worldview that promotes binary gender identity and heterosexual orientation as the normal and preferred ways of being, is promoted and reinforced in society through laws, medical care, clothing, employment, education and more (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c; Blaise and Taylor, 2012). Such social and institutional norms are powerful controlling mechanisms and thus heteronormativity and its attendant inequalities effectively limit the aspirations, choices, and trajectories of children. It leads children towards a belief that some identities and ways of being are good and others are bad, that some people belong and others do not (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b; Moffat, 2020). This only serves to support hatred and fear. Indeed, hatred largely arises from fear of the other, whether that be a fear of aspects of gender identities or sexualities, for example a 'boy' wearing pink, homosexuals being allowed to marry, or trans people being allowed to exist (Bayrakdar and King, 2021; Franta, 2021; Moffat, 2020).

One of the reasons that LGBTQ+ identities often remain marginalised in schools could be that the majority of teachers, governors and school leaders today grew up in the shadow of a piece of legislation called Section 28. This

legislation was passed in May 1988 and repealed in 2003. It banned the 'promotion of homosexuality' by schools and led to a total suppression of LGBTQ+ identities in schools. Whilst the legislation has been repealed, there has been no form of reparation for those whose identities were subjugated during those years. Indeed, the reports of teachers now not feeling they know enough to teach about LGBTQ+ identity or support LGBTQ+ pupils as discussed earlier in this review, may be seen to be a result of the absence of LGBTQ+ role models and the inadequacy of sexuality education during that time (Ellis, 2007; Lee, 2019). However, a large and growing body of scholarship in the last decade has shown profound and enduring improvements in the lives and experiences of LGBTQ+ people in the UK. The widening acceptance of gender and sexual diversity, means that more people are 'out' including 1.4. million adults in the UK according to the most recent national statistics (ONS, 2021). Thus, most people will know and interact with people who are LGBTQ+ in some aspect of their lives (DePalma and Jennett, 2010; *Stonewall*, 2019). Equally, endemic use of social media such as YouTube, forums and other networking amongst younger generations, coupled with much greater LGBTQ+ visibility in media such as film and tv means there is far greater awareness of LGBTQ+ lives and LGBTQ+ history. Nevertheless, LGBTQ+ people still face many inequalities in society and in school. Many LGBTQ+ teachers are still concerned about being discriminated against for being out in school (Lee, 2019) and many schools fear the panoptic heteronormative gaze of parents and others who decry LGBTQ+

inclusivity as 'woke' (DePalma and Jennett, 2010; Lee, 2019). The experiences of schools involved in the *No Outsiders project* have been widely documented and serve to compound such ideas (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b; Moffat, 2020). That project, conducted across 15 primary schools in England, sought to disrupt heteronormativity through critical pedagogy. Its work was severely disrupted as it gained media attention, much of it extremely negative on the grounds of morality and religion (Atkinson, 2021). However, it is important to remember that whilst some religious teachings reject LGBTQ+ identities, this is not a universal position (Blum,2010; Mirvis, 2018; Taylor and Cuthbert, 2019). Respect and tolerance for others are fundamental values of most religions and thus gender equity and LGBTQ+ inclusive practice is not incompatible with religious practice regardless of the protests of those who pick and choose aspects of theology to suit their stance in the culture wars (Carlile, 2019). Furthermore, it is important to remember that everyday heteronormative inculcation is performed by the many, not specific groups, and heteronormativity has been the dominant discourse in operation for so long that many people do not even recognise its presence (Lee, 2019; Potvin, 2016).

It was thought that from September 2020, that this would change and LGBTQ+ identities would cease to be marginalised and silenced in school due to new Department for Education regulations for relationships and sex

education (RSE) that affirm and validate LGBT identity within an inclusive framework covering race, faith, class, gender, sexuality, and disability, that teaches acceptance with no exceptions for all children (DfE, 2020b). These new requirements make it compulsory to teach children aged four upwards about healthy relationships and families, including LGBTQ+ identity, and to tackle homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia in an age-appropriate way. Given that prior to this those falling outside heteronormative understandings of gender and family were excluded by school discourses (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c; DePalma and Jennet, 2010), this was seen as a positive step. Parents and the wider community would no longer be able to stop the curriculum from being inclusive. However, as a result of Covid-19, schools have been allowed to delay the implementation of the new curriculum. Furthermore, it has already been undermined by Ofsted. Originally, it had been agreed that schools who failed to teach the new RSE curriculum would be downgraded on their Ofsted quality rating, thus ensuring that all schools engaged with the legislation. However, Ofsted now includes the caveat that primary schools will not be downgraded:

> "As long as the school can satisfy inspectors that it has still fulfilled the requirements of the DfE's statutory guidance by consulting parents on the matter" (Ofsted, 2021, p.1).

This clearly provides a loophole for schools. Those who believe that LGBTQ+ identities should not exist can teach little, or nothing, about them, claiming it is

not timely or age appropriate to do so. This could particularly be expected of schools where religious leaders, parents and or governors are themselves homophobic, bi-phobic, or transphobic. Thus, those in greatest need of that input are those least likely to receive it. At present there are too many people who do not recognise, or who do not want to recognise, their privilege and many who see widening current understandings to include everyone as a loss. This was evidenced recently in the maelstrom following transphobic statements fuelled by a fear of losing 'women' that were made in the media (Saul, 2020). There remains a culture war in this country that enables some powerful voices to deny the rights of others.

In terms of this thesis, the fact that homophobia, biphobia, and transphobia are still highly prevalent in the community means that more, not less, support is required in order for schools to tackle it. Indeed, the Depictions, Deceptions and Harm Report (*Advertising Standards Agency*, 2019) stated:

> "Young children appear to be in particular need of protection from harmful stereotypes as they are more likely to internalise the messages they see. However, there is also significant evidence of potential harm for adults in reinforcing already internalised messages about how they should behave and look on account of their gender." (*ASA*, 2019, p.9)

The policies and practices of our schools are vital in stopping the harmful spread of stereotyped ideas and actions. Research shows that both silence and a 'neutral' position towards non-hetero-sexualities renders them officially unacceptable and unspeakable, and is equivalent to school-sanctioned homophobia (Atkinson, 2021). However, proactive work that gives children the opportunity not to repeat dominant social norms gives those children back their power to consider alternative ways of thinking and being (Warin and Price, 2020). Thus, in order to be inclusive for LGBTQ+ children, teachers, governors, and parents need to acknowledge and understand both the challenges faced and the potential solutions. They must be empowered to enact change. This study asks school personnel about how their school uniform policies came into being because it is important to understand which influences are operating and how they combine to invoke change or perpetuate erasure both in and out of school. The social zeitgeist of our time is one in which LGBTQ+ identities have become far more visible than ever before but there are still a lot of areas in which improvements could be made. We are, as yet, far from a post-heteronormative society. Yet every step towards creating a society in which everyone is equal and no one is treated as less than on account of their gender identity, sexuality, race, age, disability, religion inter alia, is important. I argue that updating school uniform to reflect the diverse needs of our diverse community is a step that can, and should, be taken now.

2.6 Summary

In this chapter I explored the foundations of my research by drawing together the aims of the study and what is known and missing from existing research on its key foci, namely, school uniform and LGBTQ+ inclusivity. First, I explored why schools see uniform as important, discussing popularly held notions about belonging and academic success. I found that existing evidence shows little support for uniform fostering good behaviour, a sense of belonging, greater academic achievement, or levelling disparities on the grounds of race, class, and gender inter alia. I moved on in the second section to discuss how uniform can have the opposite effect, creating disadvantage for some groups, revealing particularly negative impacts on LGBTQ+ pupils, girls, Black students, religious minorities, and lower income families. I explored research into these effects and looked at the disparity between the outcomes of equality campaigns, given new legislation regarding the cost of uniform but none addressing issues of gender or race. In the third section I narrowed the focus to that of this study discussing why the lack of uniform equity is particularly harmful to LGBTQ+ children. I highlighted the disturbing statistics relating to levels of suicide, self-harm, and experiences of bullying amongst LGBTQ+ children. I looked at these figures in the context of current government priorities for action on child mental health and reported on a global review of evidence that suggested all these forms of harm could be stopped through allyship. Finally, I explained the importance of taking such steps to ensure that everyone is included. Thus, returning to the foundation of

this study, asking how we can work together towards a post-heteronormative society.

At the end of this review, the principal implications of the literature are that school uniform policies have a disproportionately negative effect on children who identify, or go on to identify as LGBTQ+ and that there is a need for research into the views that drive schools' interpretation and negotiation of gender equity in school policymaking. Interviewing school leaders, teachers, teaching assistants and governors will allow an exploration of the experiences of those who have, and those who have not, successfully implemented LGBTQ+ inclusive uniform policies in their schools.

The next chapter explores why and how I employed Queer Theory as the theoretical foundation of this work explaining why the concepts of heteronormative hegemony and the performativity of gender are so important in understanding the erasure of LGBTQ+ identity in school.

Chapter 3: Theoretical Framework

3.1 Working with Queer Theory

"For the question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting, is in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory we do, what it promises us and from what it promises to protect us" (Butler, 1995, p.127).

In this study I take this quote from Butler and put it to use in asking why schools come to have the school uniform policies that they do. In doing so, I make use of Butler's feminist post-structuralist informed queer theory to explore, highlight and deconstruct the influence and power of endemic heteronormativity in schools. Poststructuralism posits than in order to study a subject, in this case LGBTQ+ allyship in primary school uniform, one must also study the surrounding network of social structures and forces to ascertain their influence (Adams St. Pierre, 2000; Butler, 1990). In this study that means exploring the views of staff and governors and the enactment of policies. It also requires a consideration of the endemic heteronormativity in wider society. The term heteronormativity, a portmanteau of 'heterosexual' and 'normative', names the dominant societal assumption that everyone is or should be heterosexual, and by extension defines all other positions as abnormal. It favours heterosexual men at the expense of women and other sexualities and is intertwined with notions of a 'nuclear' family, gender roles and the performativity of gender (Butler, 1990). Queer theory interrogates the

heteronormativity in society through an interest in subjectivities and the ways in which people give meaning to their experiences. It recognises and explores the ways in which life is socially constructed through historical, social, cultural, and political experience and how this myriad of influences is experienced differently by different people (Barker and Scheele, 2016; Butler, 1990). In turn, given this relationship with experience, queer theory inscribes identity as fluid, dynamic and constructed rather than fixed within the biological body:

> "There is no gender identity behind the expression of gender; that identity is performatively constituted by the very 'expressions' that are said to be its results" (Butler, 1990, p.25).

This leads to the deconstruction of the gender binary which is important in this research. I argue that discovering how and why some schools support the deconstruction of the gender binary, thus including and accepting LGBTQ+ identities, whilst others perpetuate heteronormativity is vital so that we can work towards a post-heteronormative society where everyone is included.

At present the endemic grip of heteronormativity throughout society has created a fear of the 'other.' This fear has led to protests against schools involved in projects to foster LGBTQ+ inclusivity as was seen with the widely documented protests launched against the *No Outsiders project* (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009b; Moffat, 2020). If taken through the lens of queer theory

this can viewed as a prime example of the way in which binary thinking itself creates the 'other' (Blaise and Taylor, 2012). Numerous forces have contributed to this situation. Section 28, a knee jerk reaction imposed to prevent children being 'ruined' and moral society being 'destroyed' by children knowing that LGBTQ+ people exist, can be blamed for perpetuating this fear in public life (Atkinson, 2021; Ellis, 2007; Rasmussen, 2011). However, whilst it is easy to attribute these concerns to conservative morality and religion, it must be remembered that everyday heteronormative inculcation is performed by the many, not specific groups. Heteronormativity has been the dominant discourse in operation for so long that many people do not even recognise its presence (Lee, 2019; Potvin, 2016). It is also notable that whilst there has been a widening acceptance of gender and sexual diversity and more people are 'out' (DePalma and Jennett, 2010) those who are heterosexual are not always aware of their privilege. Unless a straight person has a personal reason, such as negotiating structures that marginalise LGBTQ+ people with a member of their family or with their friends, they have no reason to question the status quo. This leads to the perpetuation of heteronormative ways of thinking and acting and lack of impetus to consider or redress the issue of the missing rights and histories of those who are marginalised. Indeed, 80% of teachers claim they do not have enough knowledge to implement the LGBTQ+ aspects of the new RSE curriculum (Heah, 2021) and only 35% report that they know how to support LGBTQ+ pupils in their school (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a). Yet there is no national programme to redress these

concerns. Thus, teachers often unconsciously perpetuate heteronormativity through their perception of the world, their beliefs, the policies, and practices of their school and in their interactions with pupils. That is one of the reasons that efforts need to be taken to promote post-heteronormativity in schools so that society can move towards equality for everybody.

In order to discover how and why some schools have already taken steps towards post-heteronormative policymaking and enactment whilst others have not, I decided to interview school representatives with the intention of discovering how they interpreted and negotiated gender equity. Queer Theory lends itself to this use of interviews because its conceptual tools can be used to explore the normalising discourses in the testimonies of the school representatives. Such discourses are used by organisations and individuals to legitimise their views and actions. Butler (2004) defines the normalising discourses that I seek to unravel in this study as heterosexual hegemony, that is, discursive norms that maintain and support heteronormativity in social contexts. Butler (1993) uses this concept to emphasise our complicity through consent. Our active role in constructing heteronormativity through repeating it and either not challenging it or not allowing it to be challenged. The concept of hegemony provides the possibility of disrupting the endemic heteronormativity in identity construction because if hegemony is seen as organised consent the norms of heteronormativity are susceptible to subversion through performative

re-inscription if consent is removed (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). Consent is withdrawn if a school replaces the enforcement of the gender binary with a gender-neutral approach. In such schools' children have the power to subvert the hegemony through performative re-inscription, by dressing and acting in whatever way feels right to them thus the heteronormativity hegemony ceases to exist.

School is a particularly important social context in the life of most people, being a place where children spend many hours in their formative years. Therefore schools, as a microcosm of the wider society we inhabit, act as a potent force in the reproduction of heteronormativity. As a result, their complicity, the reproduction of heteronormativity hegemony, or its subversion, has powerful effects on the next generation of children and young people. Heteronormative discourses currently embedded in identities (teachers, pupils, families), ideas (curricula, policies) and officially sanctioned discussion about sexuality (relationships and sex education) have been shown to privilege heterosexuality concomitantly silencing sexual and gender-difference (DePalma and Jennett, 2010; Epstein and Johnson, 1998; Lee, 2019). When a school has a uniform policy that splits clothing options into a set of clothes girls must wear and a set of clothes boys must wear, that policy forces children to 'do' gender in a certain way. Thus, in the enactment of the policy,

schools knowingly or otherwise reproduce heteronormative hegemony and remove the potential for its subversion.

The idea that heterosexual hegemony is based on the performativity of gender and that gender identity is something that you 'do' rather than something that you essentially 'are' is another concept introduced by queer theory (Butler, 1990). From this theoretical perspective, gender is not an essential biological fact arising from the chromosomes you have, or sex organs you possess. Rather it arises from repeated actions. Butler (1993) describes this performativity as

> "Not the act by which a subject brings into being what she/he names, but rather…the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains" (Butler, 1993, p.2).

Thus, 'girls' become 'girls' by doing things that are recognisably considered correct for a 'girl', for example wearing a dress whilst 'boys' prove themselves to be 'boys' by only wearing trousers and never a dress because in the world in which we live it has generally been presumed that everyone is heterosexual and that gender is binary. However, when this expectation is questioned as it is by Queer theory, these actions are recognised as gender performance. This opens the door to an expanded definition of gender and signals the possibility of social change against dominant ideologies and practices (Rahilly, 2015;

Warin and Price, 2020). I argue that as gender binary school uniform policies enforce heteronormative dressing, they are an act of violence towards LGBTQ+ children because they marginalise and suppress some LGBTQ+ identities (Epstein et al., 2003; Warin and Price, 2020). A gender binary policy forces all children in school to dress in accordance with gender stereotypes of boy and girl. The wishes of the child, despite legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) and the UN Convention of the Rights of the Child (1989), are not taken into account. They are constrained by the rules and by the inculcation of heteronormativity to themselves and their peers. However, in Queer Theory Butler (2004) suggests that there exists the possibility of performing gender outside of the bounds of heteronormativity. Butler argues that everyone, including children, has some access to power and can create gender trouble, challenging gender stereotypes in the ways that they 'perform' being a boy or a girl, styling their bodies in ways that do not follow sex characteristics thus, resisting the signification given to sexual organs of the body (nature) and the prevailing gender order of our Western society (culture). Yet, this fails to recognise that children's power is frequently taken away. A prescriptive gender binary school uniform policy prevents any child from challenging the gender norms, except through a request for variation to a policy which even when allowed is done so for an individual child. Furthermore, whether or not it is through the granting of a variation or through the child gaining access to a form of power that does fall within the rigid binary policy, for example, a boy having long hair, the child's use of their agency is not without risk as when

performances fall outside of heteronormative framing others often view them as 'abnormal' (DePalma, 2013; Neary 2021). This is because the other children, and adults are still working through the blinkers of heterosexual hegemony.

Thus, the use of Queer Theory in this study aims to use this understanding of performativity and hegemonic heteronormativity to highlight the need for primary schools to interrogate their espoused and enacted policy assumptions. I argue that as guidance is not always followed legislation is needed to force all schools into interrogating their policies in this way in order to stop the erasure of LGBTQ+ identities in school. My argument regarding the need for legislation rather than guidance is that schools only recognise heteronormativity if members of the school who hold power are committed to genuine equality. At present there are too many people who do not recognise their privilege and also too many who see widening current understandings to include everyone as them losing something (Saul, 2020). There remains a culture war in this country that enables some powerful voices to deny the rights of others. That is why we need legislation because to move forward we need to overcome a dominant yet exclusionary norm.

The need for legislation to address dominant norms has been all too obvious during the Covid-19 pandemic. Mask wearing acts as an example of how change can be resisted and why legal structures are required. In countries where masks are routinely worn because of pollution, i.e., it is the dominant norm, people complied without major issues. However, in other countries where mask-wearing was not a 'norm' many people took issue with it. Arguments about infringements of rights, misinformation regarding perceived 'dangers' of masks became rife as did arguments about whether those with the privilege of good health should be 'forced' to wear a mask just because other people were vulnerable. There was guidance which was followed by some and not others and legislation that was followed by the majority. These are the same arguments that arise around uniform and demonstrate the operation of normative discourses as explained by Queer Theory. In the UK there is a heteronormative understanding of gender that says that gender is binary, decided by sex organs and that there is a correct way to act and dress as a female and a correct way to act and dress as a male. Whilst not everyone agrees these norms, they are perpetuated as the dominant discourse and anything different is feared and resisted. Just as in this country, masks were feared and resisted. However, just as the arguments about whether masks are 'dangerous' or whether health-age privilege should outweigh the rights of those more vulnerable, gender flexibility is questioned as radical and 'dangerous' (Warin and Price, 2020). As the healthy argue about masks, those committed to heteronormativity argue about gendered

clothing. The privileged worry that their rights are being taken by the equalisation with those who currently have less. In the pandemic that was vulnerable groups and with uniform it is equally with vulnerable groups. Furthermore, just as was seen with masks, there is a tendency for government guidance to be followed by some and not others. This is also seen in school uniform, some schools have gender-neutral policies, others have kept gender binary expectations. Legislative mandates on the other hand, made the majority follow the mask-wearing rules, and legislation would make schools move to gender-neutral uniform, thus ensuring society works together towards greater equality. Such mandates mean there is less need for the minority group to fight the privileged to be included. However, if the legal mandate is taken away, as the mask mandate was taken away the persistence of the new norm, wearing a mask, is taken away and there is an effortless recuperation to the dominant discourse, similar reactions should be expected with uniform policies (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). This is one of the reasons I argue that a legal mandate rather than non-statutory guidance is needed in order for gender-neutral uniform to be normalised and gender binary uniform be reinscribed as transgressive.

At present the dominant majority view can influence the overall outcome and this tends towards heteronormative hegemony because that is the nature of hegemony (Butler, 2004). Just as seen in the pandemic those who are, who

know and who love, people in the minority recognise the need for the change, whether that be to protect the clinically extremely vulnerable or those identifying as LGBTQ+. There are 1.4 million plus adults in this country who are LGBTQ+ (ONS, 2021). For them, their families, friends and allies, a post-heteronormative understanding of gender and sexual identity is the situation they seek to move towards. This is because just as no one who is or who knows people who were vulnerable would want to give them Covid-19, no one who is or knows an LGBTQ+ person would want them to have less rights and opportunities than themselves. Gender-neutral uniform is one step towards this. It ensures that all children have the opportunity to break the echo chains of heteronormativity through the disorganisation of consent (Butler, 2004). Previous research has shown that when children have this opportunity, they begin to take on these new discourses as their own. They will then challenge others who try to impose the binary because it has been reinscribed as transgressive (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a). Gender-neutral uniforms in all schools make schools inclusive for LGBTQ+ children because when the children see everyone has a choice of everything, they recognise this as normal, a new chain is made. Every child can perform gender and explore their identity in whatever way feels right to them. It hands back their power.

Having discussed the potential of the application of Queer theory in this research, I now move on to discuss its limitations.

3.2 Limitations

Whilst I feel that queer theory, and in particular the concepts of heteronormative hegemony and performativity, offer the most potential for employment in this research, I also recognise its limitations. A strange tempest has attended both Butler's scholarship and queer theory more generally over the past two decades resulting a range of critiques (Barvosa-Carter, 2005; Clough, 2003). These criticisms may be summarised as: ahistorical and apolitical and thus undermining the feminist project; not dealing sufficiently with biology; being overly complex in style and language; the way in which Foucauldian and Lacanian theories have been utilised and what is missing from Butler's account; issues with the way in which the heterosexual matrix was perceived and that the way transsexualism was portrayed was perceived as parody by some.

Some of the issues raised in Butler's earlier work, including those contributing to both the popularity and notoriety of *Gender Trouble* (1990), such as the totalising symbolic of the heterosexual matrix and misunderstandings of the performative theory and its consequences for the subject, agency, policy, and representation, were addressed by Butler with varying degrees of success in *Bodies That Matter (1993).* For example, the move to the use of the term 'heterosexual hegemony' as utilised in this thesis, which enables malleability in the matrix and insists on the opportunity for rearticulation (Butler, 1994).

In terms of the critique relating to the style and language (Nussbaum, 1999), Butler argues that feminists were their intended audience for *Gender Trouble* as it was a critique of compulsory heterosexuality within feminism, furthermore they deliberately targeted an academic, not populist audience in later works (Butler, 1994). Nevertheless, I would argue that Butler's written arguments are not as "ponderous and obscure" as Nussbaum claims (1999, p.38). Butler's concepts of 'heterosexual hegemony' and 'performativity' are important in this thesis and I believe I have managed to apply the theory in such a way that the concepts and their application to the data collected in the study may be easily comprehended by a general audience.

For Benhabib (1995), Fraser (1995) and Nussbaum (1999), Butler's politics are problematic because her conception of the performativity of both gender and agency advocate a particular mode of political practice that

> "…eliminate[s] not only the specificity of feminist theory but place in
> question the very emancipatory ideals of the women's movement
> altogether" (Benhabib, 1995, p.20).

These critics state that feminism has traditionally been concerned with the creation of laws through collective political action unlike Butler's feminism in which individuals' political action is manifest as the symbolic displacement of gender norms through non-repetition. As such, Butler's position fails to

disclose how this individual mode of political activity can influence broad issues of concern to women which her critics feel allows people to make bold symbolic gestures without creating any real change:

> "Institutional structure that shape women's lives have changed…These things were changed by feminists who would not take parodic performance as their answer, who thought that power, where bad, should, and would, yield before justice" (Nussbaum, 1999, p.43)

Indeed, it is Butler's notion of performativity and the ability to engage in subversive performances against heterosexual gender norms, that this thesis relies upon, that vexes so many critics. Fraser (1995) and Nussbaum (1999) are concerned about the actual impact of resignification and the influence of Butler's linguistic interventions because of the potential to shift existing norms in both conservative and progressive directions:

> "…there are dozens who would like to engage in subversive performances that flout the norms of tax compliance, of non-discrimination, of decent treatment of one's fellow students. To such people we should say, you cannot simply resist as you please, for there are norms of fairness, decency, and dignity that entail that this is bad behaviour. But then we have to articulate those norms – and this Butler refuses to do" (Nussbaum, 1999, p.43).

However, from a poststructuralist perspective, I agree with Barvosa-Carter (2005) in the argument that Butler's acknowledgment of the dynamics of social norm creation, maintenance and subordination does not necessarily banish the norms, discourses, social relations, and structures of a particular place and time. Rather, they may be used to critique and take responsibility for individual and collective actions in the struggle to advance norms of gender equality and human rights, as they are in this thesis.

For Stock, one of Butler's most voracious critics in recent times, Butler's conception of sex and gender has created a problem in so far as some people feel that gender is more important than biological sex and should be the only determining factor in access to spaces, services, and recognition, and this means that now both terms must be defended. In some respects, this argument mirrors those of earlier critics such as Benhabib (1995) and Nussbaum (1999) who argued that Butler's conception had serious negative consequences in

> "…the practical struggle to achieve justice and equality for women" (Nussbaum, 1999, p.37).

Both Stock and Nussbaum challenge Butler's treatment of the biological, but purport to be sensitive to trans people, whilst placing limits on their existence. For Nussbaum, this is shown in her agreement with Butler's claim that we

might have had many classifications of the body and that society appears

anxious to classify all humans in one box or other, however Nussbaum feels

that this does not cover indeterminate cases, and that in her view Butler is

wrong to say that power is all a body has and that it is linguistically formed

because

> "…reality shapes our choices. Culture can shape and reshape some
>
> aspects of our bodily existence" (Nussbaum, 1999, p.42).

Stock (2021) similarly believes that borderline cases only serve to reinforce

the binary biological categories and their stability in nature, lamenting that

such a position is now considered prejudiced. In addition, Butler's

conceptualisation of gender as linguistically and performatively constituted

has meant that some *Trans Exclusionary Radical Feminists* have

misappropriated the exploration of identity presented in *Gender Trouble* to

claim that gender is a choice. Furthermore, Stock, who denies being a *TERF*,

claimed that *Stonewall* has falsely created the impression that the gender

identity narrative is important and that those who go against it both erase and

create an existential threat to trans and non-binary people. She also suggests

that *Stonewall's* statistical data is flawed and has been manipulated to show

that 'othering' leads to mental distress and suicidality (Stock, 2021). Clearly in

terms of this thesis it is important to address each of these claims. Firstly,

Butler themselves has dealt with the issue of gender as a choice writing:

"I do know that some people believe that I see gender as a 'choice' rather than as an essential and firmly fixed sense of self. My view is actually not that. No matter whether one feels one's gendered and sexed reality to be firmly fixed or less so, every person should have the right to determine the legal and linguistic terms of their embodied lives" (Butler, 2015, p.1).

The position taken in this thesis is that does not deny the biological body but equally does not believe that personhood should be constrained by it, rather that it is the right of each person to determine who they are, with the belief that it is deeply arrogant for any person to assume they know someone else better than that person knows themselves. Secondly, and vitally in terms of this study, I contest Stock's charges relating to *Stonewall*. There is clear empirical evidence both in this country and overseas, of the harm caused by non-recognition, othering, and LGBTQ+ bullying and victimisation as well as the heteronormative practices of education, medicine, political and social policies. This includes, but is not limited to statistical data on mental distress and suicide amongst LGBTQ+ people from the *Health and Social Care Information Service* (2020), the *Lancet* (2019), *Office of National Statistics* (2021) and *UNICEF* (2019); and that of numerous charities including *Diversity Role Models* (2021a), *Educate and Celebrate* (2017), *GLSEN* (2017), and *Young Minds* (2021). There is also a growing body of research including that of Lansdown (2005) and Reidy (2021), and most importantly for this study, Wilson and Cariola's (2020) systematic review of LGBTQ+ youth mental

health across three continents. Thus trans, and non-binary people do exist and do experience disproportionate harm in our society.

Therefore, in this thesis, using Butler's work to argue for gender flexibility over gender essentialism in school uniform policymaking is not to deny the female sex, but instead to expand gender identity using the potential for subversion of existing heterosexual norms so that many iterations can exist and all have equal standing in terms of acceptance, visibility, and rights.

3.3 Summary

In this chapter I have explained how Judith Butler's queer theory has been employed in this research. I have discussed the ways in which I used the concept of heterosexual hegemony (Butler, 2004) to explore the words and actions of the school representatives and their colleagues as reported in the interviews. I explained why this provides insights into the prevalence of heteronormativity in school uniform policymaking and enforcement. I also drew upon the concept of performativity which Butler (1993) uses to name the repetitive 'doing' of gender by children, showing how children are forced to repeat gender norms through uniform. I went on to explain why this uniform enactment denies some LGBTQ+ identities and removes children's power.

The next chapter follows on from this engagement with the theoretical

foundations of the research, presenting my methodological framework. It also

provides a discussion of the ethics process I engaged with throughout the

research. In addition, it presents an exploration of the methods used for

sampling, data generation and analysis.

Chapter 4: Methodological Framework

4.1 Introduction

The aim of this thesis is to explore how schools interpret and negotiate gender equity in their policymaking, specifically on the issue of uniform. Therefore, I needed a methodological framework that would enable me to explore experiences and beliefs and compare and contrast them. A qualitative methodology is most suitable for this type of endeavour, and I chose semi-structured interviews as the method. I chose interviews because this meant I could engage in discussion about the perception of and motivation behind the policy choice with the people who created them and those who enact them on a daily basis. Yet I could also, using a semi-structured approach, ensure that key questions were asked so that the impacts of the policies could be compared and contrasted. Interviews provided the opportunity to discuss the lived experiences of the participants and their colleagues and pupils. Thus, from my feminist post-structuralist position, it seemed logical to use Butler's (1990) lenses of performativity and heterosexual hegemony to understand how these schools had come to act and believe in the things that they do, highlighting and deconstructing the influence and power of endemic heteronormativity.

The chapter is split into eight sections. The first provides further explanation regarding the choice of semi-structured interviews and the second discusses

the role of perception in this type of research. I then move on, in the third, to explore the ethical considerations underpinning the research. In the fourth section I explain why purposive sampling was chosen for this research and follow this with a discussion about the participants recruited. In section six I explore what was learnt from the pilot study and the changes that arose from it. In the seventh section I reflect on the data generation phase and the final section explains how queer informed thematic analysis was used to analyse the data.

4.2 Semi-Structured Interview Approach

The central aim of this qualitative research is to discover how schools have successfully created LGBTQ+ inclusive school uniform policies and practices, thus I chose semi-structured interviews as my research method. Semi-structured interviews are particularly suited to achieve that aim because such discourse allowed participants to expand on the reasons for the choices made by the school when developing the school uniform policy in a way that would not be possible using a questionnaire. Additionally, as the research topic is sensitive, individual interviews avoid school representatives fearing any judgment or reprisal as has unfortunately been experienced, and widely documented, against some educators supporting post-heteronormative schooling and LGBTQ+ rights. For example, there were protests outside some schools involved in the *No Outsiders project* and individual teachers were

targeted with violence and even death threats (Moffat, 2020, Rasmussen, 2011). Thus, I needed to ensure the mental and physical wellbeing of all participants whilst providing a safe space for them to share their views. Individual interviews allowed both of those criteria to be met.

As discussed in relation to researcher bias and dependability in earlier chapters, two advantages of interviews are that anonymised extracts can be presented and that themes arising from the data generation provide scope for discussion and recommendation without the possibility of individual identification. Analysis is only possible if the data generated is dependable and adequately addresses the research questions. Thus, I prepared the interview schedule early in the research process. This meant that it was not only reviewed by myself and my supervisor, but also by the Departmental Confirmation and Ethics panels. My process for preparing the schedule was intricate. Initially, I took each research question and wrote a list of things I would need to know to answer that question. Each of these was developed into a sub-question and then the sub-questions were refined to ensure they were open and not leading or open to misinterpretation. The order was changed several times as I read through the whole schedule to try to ensure a good flow between the things being asked and to prompt participants to expand on their answers. Discussions with my supervisor led me to think that it would be useful to add two further questions at the beginning of the

schedule asking for general information about the participant and school so that the person felt comfortable talking. The facts relating to these questions were already known from first contact with the school, for example: school location and size and participant name and role. However, I believe asking these questions helped to calm any nerves the participant might have and gave them the confidence to put forward their views in later responses. The final consideration in the development of the schedule was length. Thus, a pilot study was undertaken with different participants to the main study, to ensure this was appropriate prior to contact being made with other schools.

With the schedule complete (see Appendix Four), the interviews with school staff and governors took place in 2021. Each interview was conducted by telephone due to the ongoing pandemic and each lasted approximately 40 minutes. The participant was encouraged to lead as much of the discussion as possible to reduce the possibility of interviewer bias (Creswell, 2013). Interviews were also audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim for analysis so that they could be repeatedly revisited to check that emergent themes remained true to the participant accounts.

Fifteen interviews are presented in this thesis. Each interview elicits the reasons behind the choice of policy at that school, queries adaptations,

explores who was involved and asks how barriers could be overcome. I argue

that Queer Theory lends itself to this use of inductively analysed interviews

because within these stories of how schools came to gender-equitable

LGBTQ+ inclusive policy or maintained a gender binary, the collection of

normalising discourses that maintain and support heteronormativity in social

contexts can be seen (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009c; Warin and Price, 2020).

Thus, lessons can be learnt regarding what leads to it being challenged and

what leads to it being perpetuated.

4.3 Perception

From an epistemological standpoint, this study rejects the idea that there

exists any absolute 'truth', instead considering all knowledge to be subjective

and culturally constituted through the ideological and normative processes of

the time and place in which the person exists and has existed. Thus,

knowledge is only ever partial and contextual (Berger, 2013; Barker and

Scheele, 2016). The narratives the participants shared with me represent the

thoughts and perceptions that they felt able to share. I cannot know, or be

expected to know how they constructed those thoughts or how they filter their

perception of the world. Equally, I recognise that my understanding of what

they shared will always be affected by my own worldview because no person

can stand outside of themselves. Thus, in presenting these participant

narratives an approach is taken that rejects the positivist quest for objective measurable reality (Marsh, Ercan and Furlong, 2018).

4.4 Ethics

Ethics are another key component in the design of this research. It is vital that all individuals and schools involved in this study are protected from harm resulting from their participation. Consideration of these issues was thorough and approval for the study was sought from *Lancaster University Ethics Committee* at the outset. This ensured that there were no significant issues that I had overlooked prior to the commencement of the study. The approval certificate can be found in Appendix One. Nevertheless, ethics is not a singular exercise to gain institutional approval for research, rather is it is an ongoing process that seeks to consider and protect the wellbeing of all those involved throughout the research process.

One of the first ethical considerations I addressed was being mindful of the power imbalances and dependent relationships that can occur with participants (Berger 2013; Mertens, 2012). In this case, whilst having previously worked with some of the schools and thus some members of staff as an outside contractor, there exists no current personal relationship with any person working in or attending any of the schools involved in the study.

Nevertheless, my prior knowledge of the setting, gained through previous research, employment and residence in the county, provided me with a working knowledge of the locality and how to access the information required to sample and recruit schools in the area.

In order for the research sample to be identified and contact to be made, I collected various personal contact details. I was the only person with access to these details and I conducted all of the interviews, transcription and analysis personally thus removing the potential for data breach. The data is now held securely on an encrypted drive in my possession which ensures compliance with the GDPR (2018) and the UK Data Protection Act (2018). Additionally, I made the conscious decision not to share any of the data generated in a data archive or repository due to its sensitive nature, the small sample size, and the attendant risk that participants could be identified. However, in line with university protocols, I will retain the original recordings and transcripts securely for ten years at which point they will be permanently destroyed.

However, I am acutely aware that researchers have a duty of care to all participants taking part in research studies and that this goes further than ensuring data security. Thus, I took the responsibility for ensuring that no

physical or mental harm was inflicted upon participants as a result of taking

part in my research (Mertens, 2012). I considered in detail all of the possible

scenarios resulting from participation. I judged there to be no risk of

discomfort greater than everyday life as all members of a school team can

reasonably expect to have to explain school policy to parents and carers,

other members of staff and members of the public at various times during the

course of their work. However, due to the timing of the research, the global

Covid-19 pandemic presented unprecedented challenges. I designed the

study during the first lockdown which occurred in March 2020. As such the

intention from the outset was to collect data using a method that took into

account social distancing measures, the likely lack of access to schools for

the researcher, and the time constraints experienced by schools due to the

additional workload generated by new 'Covid-safe' working practices. It was

for these reasons that I chose telephone interviews rather than Zoom video

conference or Microsoft Teams video. It was vital that the individual could not

be personally targeted as participants in some previous research studies have

been. For example, personal threats were made against teachers, and school

boycotts and protests were started by parents in response to the *No Outsiders*

project (Moffat, 2020) and it was my responsibility to ensure that no individual

involved in my study was subject to the same or similar treatment.

Furthermore, there exists an ethical imperative to create a research

environment that is conducive to enabling reporting in ways that do not feel

"personally intrusive or morally judgemental" (Buckingham et al, 2010, p.59),

so it was important that given the timing participants could choose where and when they took the call (*Lancaster University*, 2020).

Nevertheless, at the time of inception, neither I nor the schools expected that nearly twelve months later the country would be in lockdown once again. I had planned for teachers working in different ways, but in January when recruitment was due to begin, Covid death and infection rates were higher than ever before. It became increasingly clear that to carry out data generation merely to further a research project at this time seemed inappropriate. Thus, I postponed the planned data generation for four months following the pilot study, resuming only when schools were open, lockdown was over and the mass immunisation programme completed for the most vulnerable and established for the rest of the population.

During the recruitment phase I provided each participant with a Participant Information Sheet and Written Consent Form for the study. Copies of these documents may be found in Appendices 2 and 3 respectively. There was no deception involved this research. Participants were mailed copies of the interview questions along with the invitation to participate. These documents provided full details of the aims and objectives of the research and explained what would be required of participants before, during and after the interview

process. They also outlined how data generated by the interviews would be used. Furthermore, I provided contact details for both myself and my supervisor and explained the actions I would take to ensure privacy and data security (Cohen et al., 2011; *Lancaster University*, 2020). The majority of participants returned the electronic rather than postal copy of the forms due to Covid-19 working practices. Therefore, I asked each participant to verbally re-confirm their agreement at the start of each recording. Pilot study participants were made aware that their responses would not be included in the final data analysis but that their privacy and data security would be similarly protected. I gave all participants two weeks following their interview to withdrawal from the study. None of the participants requested this. I believe this shows that they felt fully informed about the process and positive about their contribution.

I did not encounter any ethical issues during data generation. Everything went as planned from my perspective and I found that school representatives were themselves mindful of possible ethical concerns and did not, for example, name children or teachers involved in events that they discussed. One participant did have to reschedule the interview at short notice due to attendance at an unplanned meeting. However, this did not cause any issues as I was able to re-schedule the interview for another time to suit the individual involved.

By way of reciprocity and in demonstration of the ethic of care, following the study schools involved were provided with web-based resource links to support them in working towards a school culture that recognises heteronormativity and mitigates its power through the development of policies that enable children to grow up free from the constraints of heterosexist norms and stereotypes.

4.5 Sampling

Moving on from the exploration of ethics, it is important to situate this study and its participants. As I have said, the sample included fifteen interviewees representing primary schools from across the county of Nottinghamshire.

Nottinghamshire is a large county with an estimated population of over 800,000. Situated in the East Midlands region of England, and excluding the unitary authority of the City of Nottingham, the county is comprised of seven districts: Ashfield, Bassetlaw, Broxtowe, Gedling, Mansfield, Rushcliffe, and Newark and Sherwood. It is a county of distinct contrasts with areas of wealth and also extreme poverty, localities which are culturally diverse and those which are significantly White British, high density ultra-urban zones and sparsely populated rural villages. Within the county there are three hundred and thirty-seven schools, of which two hundred and seventy-nine cater for

children in the primary phase. These include infant, junior, and primary schools and 3-19 academies. Therefore, there was a field of two hundred and seventy-nine possible schools to include in the study.

This research aims to find out how primary schools interpret and negotiate gender equity in their uniform policies and discover what impact they think this has on their pupils. I chose to focus on the primary years as children report that they are bullied and know others who are bullied for their gender and or sexual identity at primary school. LGBTQ+ adults report that such experiences in primary school affected them throughout their school career and beyond (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a; *Stonewall*, 2017). Furthermore, research has shown that even in Nursery children have an idea of the gendered expectations placed upon them and induct other children in the performance of gender norms (Blaise and Taylor, 2012; Warin and Price, 2020). Therefore, as the new LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum now makes it compulsory not just for secondary but also for primary schools to recognise LGBTQ+ identities, this seems like an appropriate time to look at other aspects of school policy and practice that impact on the educational experiences of LGBTQ+ children.

Whilst my intention was to look at the primary phase broadly, I knew that it would be impossible to interview representatives from every primary phase

school. Clearly such an endeavour would require a significant degree of time and in any case, I recognise that not all schools would wish to take part. I therefore chose to focus on my home county of Nottinghamshire. I was aware from engagement with the literature that there were a number of characteristics that are seen to affect the negotiation of gender equity and thus I knew the sample needed to be large enough to cover these positions. There is much debate around the ideal sample size for thesis qualitative studies with recommendations ranging from a minimum of ten to as many as fifty. Thus, I decided that twenty-seven interviews, which is 10% of the total number of primary schools in the county, would be an appropriate sample size. I felt this would balance the need for sufficient depth to ensure accurate representation with the time available (O'Reilly and Parker, 2012). At the outset, I took a strategic approach to recruitment, adopting metrics to classify the schools into groups according to a number of characteristics. To achieve this, I began with an interrogation of the school search feature of Nottinghamshire County Council's website. This feature provided, in alphabetical order, the name, contact number and website address of every primary phase school in Nottinghamshire, as well as several other characteristics previous research had suggested to be indicators of the type of uniform a school would have. Each school page was opened and the name, contact number, email address, area, and locality (urban or rural), was recorded on a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet. Links to each school's Ofsted report were followed and the number of children on roll at the time of

inspection was recorded. It was also noted if the school was of religious character, including identification of faith. Finally, each school website was visited to check and record the type of school (multi-academy trust, independent academy, or community) and access the published school uniform policy. I read each school uniform policy and classified it as gender-neutral if the school had one list of clothes for any child and as gender binary if it had either separate lists for boys and girls or one list but with some items, such as summer dresses specified by gender. This process took a considerable amount of time with accuracy being paramount to ensure the integrity of the research. Initially I contacted one school from each group of characteristics. If that school declined, I contacted the next school in that group from the spreadsheet I had created. Thus, it is worth noting that participating schools were self-selecting to some extent and it must be expected that those involved were those who particularly wished to make their views known. Nevertheless, efforts were made to be inclusive and representative through the use of wide invitations. Despite these actions, due to the ongoing global pandemic, many schools felt unable to participate, citing teacher burnout and high workloads. Thus, I decided to extend the interview phase by several months and sent all primary phase schools in the county a postal invitation to take part. These invitations included a copy of the interview questions so all potential participants knew what to expect from the interview and could prepare answers if they felt they needed to. Eventually, fifteen schools put forward a representative and these individuals formed the final

sample. I did not request a specific person in a particular role when I contacted the schools, instead allowing the school to put forward a representative willing to take part. This was because I wanted to speak to individuals who had direct contact with children and could report on what was happening in school on a daily basis, as well as those who had dealt with administrative issues regarding uniform, members of the leadership team and non-teaching governors, in order to see where the power was in choosing and enforcing uniform policy whilst also being able to assess the perceived impact of the policy on children in school. Thus, noting that some of those who came forward had multiple roles in school, the final sample consisted of: one headteacher, one deputy headteacher, one SENCO, five teachers, four teaching assistants, four parents, three school business managers or admin personnel, and three governors including a Chair and Vice-Chair. Whilst, small and less than I had initially hoped, I believe that this sample is sufficient and that the resulting narrative will resonate with most people (Saunders et al, 2018; Youdell, 2006).

It is important to point out that whilst this research is about the impact of uniform on children there is a notable absence of children's voices in the above discussion regarding the participant sample. This omission was deliberate and is due to the research being carried out during the pandemic when children were being home-schooled, in school part-time, and when

schools did not want anyone other than essential staff on the premises due to protective working practices to mitigate the risk of Covid-19. Thus, I was unable to carry out focus groups with children in school. Arguably, I could have carried out focus groups using Zoom but I personally felt that it was inappropriate from a safeguarding perspective to have a stranger (myself) talking to children via Zoom, particularly when they may not have the support of a teacher present to support them. Thus, I decided from the outset not to involve children in this study. I do however, believe that it would be useful for post-pandemic research to address this gap.

4.6 Participants

As explained, fifteen participants took part in the study and under the duty of care to these participants I decided, from the outset, to refer to them using pseudonyms. This not only preserves the anonymity of the individual schools and their representatives as discussed in the ethics section, but also helps participants to feel that they can give honest and open answers free from the judgement of others. I have presented relevant details of the participants below. The pseudonyms chosen have no relationship to either the person or the school. Equally, the profiles below are simply presented in alphabetical order.

Table 4.1 Participant profiles, 2021

Pseudonym	Role	Type	Faith	Locality	Type of Uniform
Ash	School Business Manager	Community	Non-faith	Urban City border town	Gender-neutral
Coleen	Teaching Assistant	Community	Non-faith	Urban Commuter town	Gender-neutral
Eileen	Teacher and SENCO	Community	Church of England	Rural County town	Gender-neutral
Gladys	School Office Manager	Community	Non-faith	Rural Market town	Gender-neutral
Gloria	Teaching Assistant	Multi-Academy Trust	Church of England	Rural Village	Gender biased

Henry	Teacher, Senior Leadership Team and Staff Governor	Community	Non-faith	Rural Village	No uniform
Isla	Teaching Assistant and Office Administrator	Community	Non-faith	Urban Commuter town	Gender biased
Jill	Vice Chair of Governors	Multi-Academy Trust	Non-faith	Rural County border town	Gender-neutral
Lisbeth	Headteacher	Community	Non-faith	Urban Former mining town	Gender binary
Lucy	Teaching Assistant	Community	Non-faith	Rural Market town	Gender-neutral

Rachel	Teacher	Community	Non-faith	Urban City border town	Gender biased
Ritchie	Teacher	Community	Non-faith	Urban Former mining town	Gender- neutral
Roscoe	Teacher	Multi- Academy Trust	Church of England	Rural County border town	Gender biased
Solly	Teaching Assistant	Single Academy	Non-faith	Urban Commuter town	Gender biased
Valerie	Chair of Governors	Single Academy	Non-faith	Urban Commuter town	Gender biased

As can be seen in the Table above, the participants reflected a range of roles,

ages, and genders because each individual's own world view affects their

perception of what is happening in any place or space at any given time. The range meant that individuals had different perceptions and life experiences related to their own gender identity. Some had completed their teacher training during the time of Section 28 and others far more recently, reflecting wider generational changes with regard to acceptance of LGBTQ+ identities. In addition, it was important to include representatives from faith schools and multi-academy trusts as religion and neoliberalism are often seen as places that are more likely to pursue gender binary and prescriptive 'white collar' types of school uniform. From my own experience working in and with schools, I also believed that it was important that a range of roles were represented because headteachers and governors may not have an overall understanding of how policies are being enacted at the classroom level, thus the results could be misleading in terms of drawing conclusions regarding pupils' experience of the policy. Equally, teachers and teaching assistants may not have any knowledge of how the policy was developed if they were not involved in the process, yet they, and those who are both parents and staff, are likely to have an intense engagement with pupils greater than that of those in other roles and thus have more knowledge of the impact upon them.

4.7 Pre-Trawl

As briefly described in the sampling section, I carried out a pre-trawl prior to recruiting participants in order to gain a working knowledge of uniform policies across the county and successfully recruit a representative sample.

I began this stage by creating a database of schools and features that I believed were important to investigate as a result of completing the literature review and those that I needed in order to contact schools regarding participation. Having created the database to store the information I accessed the Nottinghamshire County Council website school search feature and systematically collected the required information. Initially, I searched for primary phase schools and recorded all of the names. I then visited the link for each school to record their physical and email addresses, telephone contact number and the name of the headteacher and school office manager in order to write to them regarding participation in the study. I also noted the number of pupils on role and the area in which the school was located as Nottinghamshire is divided into seven districts some of which are rural and others which are on the city border. I thought that it would be interesting to see if there was a correlation between the size of the school, the type of area the school inhabited, or whether there was a pattern of uniform classification across families of schools or districts. However, having collected data on all 279 schools, I did not find such a relationship.

The Nottinghamshire County Council school search feature also provides a link to each school's Ofsted report, so I followed each link and recorded the Ofsted grading of the schools, whether or not the school was of religious character including the identification of faith, and whether the school was recorded as a community school, single academy or part of a multi-academy trust. I wondered if this would be a predictor of gender-neutral or gender binary policy, but again on later investigation found that these metrics could not predict the type of policy a school would have.

Finally, I visited each school website and accessed the school uniform page on the website, the school prospectus, and the published school uniform policy. In some cases, not all of these documents were available online and I had to request them separately. The purpose of accessing all of these versions of the uniform list was to see what messages parents and carers were receiving about the uniform. Not all parents read the full uniform policy, particularly prior to their child starting school, but all will either look at the website or check the prospectus to find out what they need to buy for their child. I found that the websites tended to just list the clothes whilst prospectuses also included a statement about why there was a uniform. On reading each policy I classified it as gender-neutral if the school had one list of clothes for any child and as gender binary if it had either separate lists for boys and girls or one list but with some items, such as summer dresses or

shorts specified by gender. Interestingly, the majority of schools had the same base uniform, a polo shirt and sweatshirt in the school colours, with navy, grey or black trousers, skirt or pinafore. Stephenson (2021) notes that there is no obvious origin of this trend for only grey, navy, or black as base garments yet it has endured since the 1950s. Sometimes schools also had a cardigan, tights and gingham summer dress option for girls and a tailored shorts option for boys, and for those with a gender-neutral uniform these items were sometimes available for all. The majority of schools were very specific about colours and lengths of socks, the majority being black or white only. They were also consistent in not allowing any jewellery except one pair of stud earrings which had to be removed for P.E. or be covered with plasters. Some, but not all schools also allowed children to wear a watch. It was common for rules on hair to be included with only plain 'school colours' hair ties for those with long hair, sometimes specified as relating only to girls, and no bright colours or shaved patterns, sometimes specified as relating only to boys. Reading bag and P.E bag specifications often featured on the list as did P.E kit with dark shorts and white polo shirts. Some schools allowed trainers but many specified plimsolls for no clear reason. All schools with uniform seemed to valorise black leather shoes or black 'school shoes' yet the literature shows that there is no health and safety reason for this (Reidy, 2021). Equally there is no indication that parents would send their children in something inappropriate if they were not given such specific rules. Children of primary school age do not have money to buy clothes, shoes and haircuts, nor are

they likely to have something else to quickly change into on their way to school, so parents or carers are controlling what clothes, shoes and hairstyles they have access to and what they put on before school in the morning. No child turns up to school in their underwear or similar, thus these rules are aimed at expressing expectations to parents rather than children. Intriguingly, none of the schools had rules about coats. There was nothing about colour, style, type or even whether or not a child should bring one. Children wear them during the school day if it is cold and coats make them look different and could convey wealth just as much as any other garment, yet parents are trusted on this issue. This seems to contradict the reasons given for having other aspects of uniform.

Only the full uniform policies gave a full explanation of the reasons the school felt the policy was important, how they believed it met the needs of the whole school community, met the requirements of equal opportunities legislation, and provided details of what to do if a variation was required and possible reasons deemed acceptable to request such a variation. I found it interesting that the following explanation appeared in many policy documents:

> "Our policy on school uniform is based on the belief that school uniform: Promotes a sense of pride in the school; Encourages a sense of community and belonging towards the school; Is practical and smart; Prevents children from coming to school in clothes that could be

distracting in class; Makes children feel equal to their peers in terms of

appearance; Is regarded as suitable wear for school and good value for

money by most parents; Is designed with health and safety in mind."

(School 104)

However, the significance of this is perhaps reduced by the knowledge that

this statement is drawn from the Department for Children, Schools and

Families School Uniform Guidance (2010) that proceeded the current

Department for Education School Uniform Guidance (2013). Thus, I decided

to further interrogate the policy explanations using content analysis by word

frequency in order to see if there was any relationship between those that

were gender-neutral and those that were gender binary across the whole set.

By copying and grouping the policy explanations then inputting them into a

word cloud generator I was able to extract the top ten most common words for

each policy type as shown in the figures below:

Figure 4.7.1 Top ten most frequent word cloud for gender neutral policy
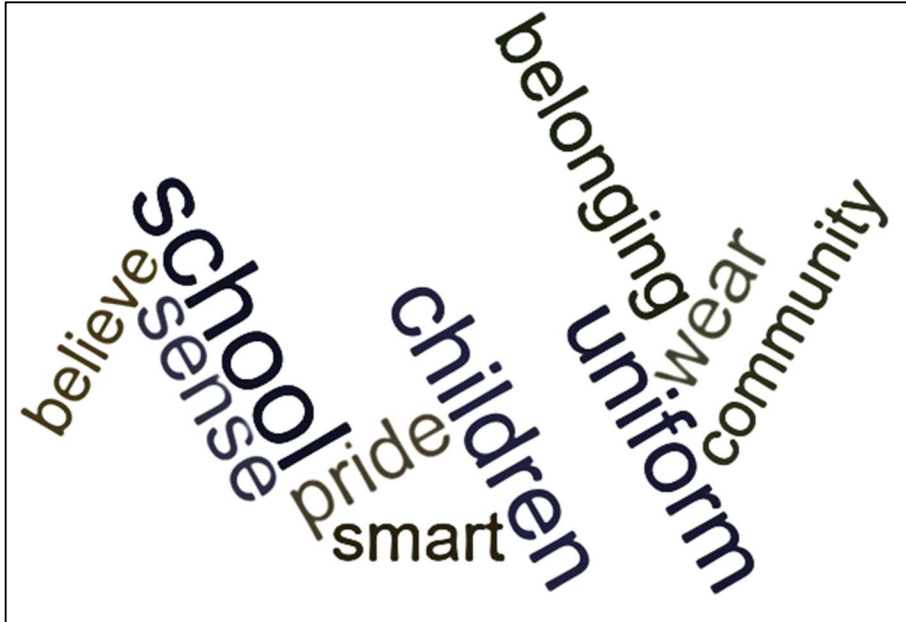
explanations, December 2020.

Figure 4.7.2 Top ten most frequent word cloud for gender binary policy

explanations, December 2020.

The result was two very similar word sets showing the commonalities in policy explanation but not revealing any meaningful reason for maintaining a binary policy over a gender-neutral one. Thus, proving the importance of the interview process in discovering the reasoning behind the policies. Furthermore, on reading each of the policies, I discovered that they all had been reviewed within the last three years at the time of accessing the document (December 2020). Yet I was told later by many interviewees that their policy had not changed for decades, so it seemed that schools felt that there had been little change in uniform trends and pupil needs, despite regular reviews. Having recorded these observations for later use, I moved onto the next phase of the study, the interviews.

4.8 Pilot

The pilot study was the first time that I had run through the interview schedule with someone outside of the research department. I had planned a series of three interviews to test the validity of the Interview schedule, verify the technology involved in the recording and to test my own ability to act as an interviewer in this context. In terms of the validity of the schedule, I needed to find out whether the questions I planned to ask would generate the data I needed to answer the research questions. I also wanted to gather feedback on how the participants felt about being asked those questions and whether there was anything they felt was not clear. In terms of my own ability to act as

interviewer, I needed to check that I could maintain a neutral stance and appear confident and friendly. This is vital in fostering a productive dialogue and ensuring participants feel able to share their views and experiences.

The participants in the pilot study were three senior teachers from different schools outside Nottinghamshire and thus not part of the study cohort. It could be said that the circumstances of these interviews were somewhat different to the main study because these individuals were known to me. However, the point of the pilot was not to generate data for the study, rather it was to test the study instruments. This proved wise as whilst the pilot interviews went well there were a number of key learning points and changes were made in the light of these.

The first issue came to light during the first two interviews. It was felt that the introduction felt 'cold' when spoken aloud rather than creating a welcoming atmosphere that would encourage discussion. Thus, I altered the wording. I also added an important technical note at the beginning asking whether the participant could hear clearly and reminded them of where to find my contact details should they have any questions or concerns following the interview. I also decided that the question order was wrong. As the interviewer I had to return to earlier points in a manner that meant that the participant was less

likely to expand on their views. This was incredibly important for the generation of useful data.

Technical issues were the second major finding of the pilot study. The first two interviews utilised an audio recording app which appeared to be working but post-interview was discovered to produce blank incoming sound files. When tested solo this had not occurred. It was later discovered that the issue was due to new Google restrictions for Android which blocked the recording of callers on the operating system. Thus, having used a Samsung mobile device to make the call I could be heard but not the participant. Such findings highlight the importance of pilot studies for successful data generation, particularly when interviewing. A workaround for this issue was investigated and I made the decision to use *Appliqato* Automatic Call Recorder which was not affected by the restrictions, in conjunction with local device storage secured by *Bullguard* Mobile Security. The third pilot proved this strategy worked with a clear two-way recording being created for transcription.

Having addressed the technical issues and completed a third pilot interview I reviewed my own performance. Stylistic notes from pilot interviews are always important to address as these can have a significant effect on participant responses. Feedback from participants in the first two pilot interviews suggested that I seemed nervous. This was entirely true and primarily arose

from a desire to ensure the interviews went well and not to speak too much and influence the responses. However, feedback from the third interviewee suggested a good balance had been struck. The updated interview schedule had enabled the generation of the type of information hoped for, raised plenty of points for discussion and enabled me to conduct the interview with confidence and clarity.

The last, and arguably most important, finding of the pilot study was that the question that specifically asked about trans and non-binary pupils led to the participants responding "No we don't have/never had/ anyone like that" (Pilot 1) and "No it wasn't trendy or really something people considered when the policy was written" (Pilot 2). This raised concerns as to whether the question implied that being trans or non-binary was a problem, condoned that viewpoint, or reduced gender neutrality to one issue. There are many reasons why gendered uniform policies are problematic. However, I believe that these points being raised is actually vital if they are to be addressed by the study. I need to explore what manifests and perpetuates such views to find clues as to how they may be deconstructed. It is only then that we will know how to encourage a different, more inclusive approach going forward. Thus, the question was retained.

4.9 Data Generation

I started the interview with a couple of open questions in an attempt to put interviewees at ease and establish a rapport which worked well in most cases but in some led the participant to ask for clarification as to what I wanted to know. At first this surprised me and I responded by suggesting they told me things like the area, the size of the school and its ethos. On reflection I can see that whilst I thought this was a familiar question it was often role dependent. Headteachers, for example, are used to providing a summary of their school for documents and inspections thus, some people were used to this whilst others did not have that experience.

The interviews were semi-structured which provided some direction but I allowed space for participants to recount their experiences. This sometimes meant that an answer to a question would cover another that I intended to ask later. When this happened, I encouraged further exploration of that experience and took up any areas that needed further clarification at the time as I felt this was likely to provide more authentic answers than asking the question again later on. Asking a question that a person feels they already covered can lead them to assume that you did not agree with what they originally said and that you are looking for them to give a different answer by asking again which was something I was keen to avoid.

As might be expected given that the participants had volunteered to be interviewed, I found them to be keen to share their experiences. Most participants had lots of information to share except one who seemed to be very blunt in most responses. Yet as we moved onto later questions this interviewee actually made some key points that became important when analysing the data. I was concerned at the time wondering if something I had said had led that person to feeling that I was pushing a certain agenda, namely trans inclusivity, and that as their position was very different to that I wondered if they felt judged by me. However, I have listened to that interview since during the transcription phase and I had not given any impression of my viewpoint at all. Looking back on the conversation I think that the person was just very sure of their position and it was not that they did not want to expand but that they really did not think it was necessary.

As each interview progressed, I followed up questions with queries that I felt were pertinent to the response given. Sometimes this was to elicit a greater understanding of their motivation for an action. Other times it was to explore the reasoning behind their viewpoint or to discover more about a challenge they, or those they spoke of, had faced. With many of the interviewees I felt an openness and desire to express the inclusivity of their school and their pride in the work they had done to that end. In some of those cases I felt almost guilty not to be able to validate that with my own perspective because I

have worked for many years in inclusion and personally find it heartening to hear about situations where this is working. Conversely, I found some of the interviews very disheartening when situations were described that had caused distress to children and where there was bias that in the course of my usual employment I would have picked up and discussed with that organisation. However, it was important to maintain researcher neutrality. This is something I had practiced following the pilot interviews and prior to the main data generation. Thus, I had written prompts on my copy of the interview schedule as a reminder of non-leading responses to use. These included: "Was that universally the position, did governors/staff/children all take the same view?", "Can you tell me more about that?", "What do you think are the reasons for that?", "Can you give me an example?" and "Where do you think those views come from?". I also used voice inflection as encouragement and semi-verbal meaningless expressions such as "umm" that the participant could interpret in any way they wished whilst still encouraging them to magnify or leave a point as they saw fit.

Reflecting on the data generation phase, I think that it went well. In non-Covid times it would have been nice to have these conversations face to face and with greater numbers of people. Yet the amount of information gathered from these interviews was huge and as I have found as I have transcribed and made notes on the data, there is a clear heteronormative bias.

After completing the transcription and allowing the participants time to request alterations I began the process of data analysis.

4.10 Data Analysis

I had transcribed each of the interviews personally in the days following the interview, preferring this approach over batch transcription at the end of the interview phase as it enabled me to address any issues arising from interview technique and recording quality. I shared the completed transcript with each interviewee on completion and they were given a fortnight to review the document and request alterations. I felt that this demonstrated the ethic of care towards my participants and a commitment to accurate representation of their lived experience. Encouragingly, whilst all of the participants were sent transcripts, none requested alterations. Thus, two weeks after the last interview I was able to begin the analysis.

At this point I changed the colour of each transcript, assigning one colour per participant and printed them out. I am fully aware that the next stage can be completed using *Nvivo 12.2* as I have used this software in the past and I acknowledge that it is a valuable tool. However, personally I prefer to do things manually, particularly in the early stages. Thematic analysis normally begins with data familiarisation. However, as I was both the interviewer and

transcriber, I had prior knowledge of the content of each recording thus producing the transcripts was essentially a re-reading of the data. Therefore, I was able to move on to data coding. The epistemological position of this thesis is that of poststructuralism. The use of this perspective within thematic analysis establishes ways in which participants give meaning to their experiences. I used an inductive approach to coding rather than a predetermined framework as poststructuralism posits that to understand participants experiences the surrounding historical, social, cultural and political forces must also be considered. This is because they are encountered and understood differently by each individual (Barker and Scheele, 2016; Butler, 1990). I began by reading through each transcript line by line and assigning a code. Each code was a word or two that summarised the content of a sentence or phrase in the transcript. Such semantic coding provides a surface level description of the participants' experience. I then moved on to the latent coding of each transcript in which I assigned codes that interpreted the participants' experiences in terms of their wider meanings and implications (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Patton, 1990). Once the codes had been cross checked they were collated and I identified seven themes across the entire dataset. This ensured that the themes were closely linked to the narratives of the participants rather than any preconceived bias. The themes identified were: *Choice, Binaries, Denial, Change, Covid-19, Belonging, and Social Class*. I used these to structure the analysis chapter with quotes used

being those that they were illustrative of the theme or representative of a number of interviewees responses.

4.11 Summary

In this chapter I provided strategy and rationale behind the research method employed in this study. I explained why a qualitative approach was needed and that semi-structured interviewing enabled me to develop an understanding of the how and why of individual schools' approaches to policy development and enactment. I discussed the interview schedule explaining how the questions were developed from my research aims. I also briefly returned to theory as explored in Chapter Three to show how my feminist post-structuralist stance linked the use of Butler's Queer Theory with the semi-structured interview method chosen to enable stakeholder voices and explore, highlight, and deconstruct the influence and power of endemic heteronormativity in school policymaking. I moved on to describe the process of gaining ethical approval and the ethical considerations I had implemented throughout the research process to ensure that participants were safe and the research findings were dependable. Following this I provided the reasoning for the method of sampling and described the setting, that is the county of Nottinghamshire and the participants recruited. Within this description I explored some of the characteristics that are thought to influence gender-equity reasoning in society and thus predict the type of policy a school would

have and demonstrated that these variables were covered in the participant sample. Later in the chapter I reflected on the pilot study that I carried out with three teachers from outside of the region prior to the main data generation phase. I explained that whilst the data from these pilot interviews was not included in the sample, I gained vital knowledge about conducting the interviews and subsequently made alterations to my interviewing style and the interview schedule to help put interviewees at ease and establish a friendly rapport that would encourage the sharing of beliefs and experiences. I followed this with a reflection on the main data generation process before finally explaining how queer theory informed thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The next chapter presents the results of this analysis.

Chapter 5: Exploring the Interpretation and Negotiation of Uniform Policymaking and Practice through School Interview Transcripts

5.1 Introduction

In the previous chapter I explained how the data generated in the interviews was analysed using queer theory informed thematic analysis. The process began with verbatim transcription of the interviews. This was followed by the latent and semantic coding of the data and the refining of codes into emergent themes. The themes identified were: Choice, Binaries, Denial, Change, Covid-19, Belonging, and Social Class. In this chapter I examine each of these seven themes through the lens of queer theory. I use quotes from the interview transcripts that illustrate the theme or represent multiple interviewee responses, analysing the views and experiences of the school representatives and those they work with. The concept of heterosexual hegemony is used to explore the words and actions of the interviewees and show how these can affect the developing worldview of all children. I also draw upon the concept of performativity, which Butler uses to name the repetitive 'doing' of gender by children, to examine how children are forced to reproduce dominant gender norms in response to the requirements of the school. I use this understanding to explain why the enactment of uniform policy denies some LGBTQ+ identities and removes children's power.

5.2 Theme 1: Choice

In Britain school uniform tends to be a ubiquitous part of children's everyday lives. The interview transcripts suggest that not only do most schools have a uniform but almost every school utilises the same items. Valerie, Ash and Gloria's testimonies demonstrate these similarities:

> "It's a navy-blue polo shirt, or a white polo shirt with the school logo on and then there's a dark grey trouser or a dark grey pinafore dress or a dark grey skirt and they can wear dark grey socks or tights but not leggings" (Valerie, Chair of Governors)

> "Navy or black trousers, a red sweatshirt, a red polo shirt, and a navy-blue sweatshirt and then the girls have an optional obviously, have either a cardigan, or they can wear a pinafore dress" (Ash, School Business Manager)

> "So, its grey skirt or grey trousers and a green polo shirt. We do sell, with a uniform shop, green polo shirts with the logo on but a plain green polo shirt is ok as well and a green cardigan or sweatshirt" (Gloria, Teaching Assistant)

All of these schools have a dark trouser, skirt and dress, polo shirt and sweatshirt, only the colours differ. This could be seen to demonstrate that schools have a set idea of what children in general should look like at school. Alternatively, it may simply show an awareness of the items available for

families to buy. Interestingly all of the respondents initially listed their uniform in one list as above. However, when questioned as to whether these options were for all children most then explained that no, they were not. They often moved on to explain which items were for girls and which were for boys, demonstrating the implicit gender binarism in the policies. For example, Valerie and Rachel, respectively, said:

> "So, the jumper, the polo shirt and the trouser are for everyone then the girls have the option of wearing a dress or skirt" (Valerie, Chair of Governors)

> "All the children can wear trousers and the jumper obviously. I think it does specify girls can wear skirts, boys can wear shorts" (Rachel, Teacher)

At both of these schools, and most others, trousers were seen as unisex items that all children had the option of wearing which suggests feminist recognition however there was no consideration that a boy might want to wear a skirt or that any child might be gender fluid. Queer Theory suggests a person can, and should, be able to discover their own gender and sexuality without any preconceived ideas (Butler, 1990) but these interview narratives show that heteronormativity and gender binary thinking permeate school policies. Thus, children do not always have all options available to them.

Nevertheless, not all schools viewed gender in this way and thus heteronormativity in policy and practice is not inevitable. Eileen said:

> "On the actual list it doesn't say boys wear this, girls wear that. You know, when I started teaching twenty-seven years ago it would have probably said girls' uniform, boys' uniform but now I think everyone's much more mindful of that, well our school is anyway" (Eileen, SENCO)

The quote here is from the transcript of an interview with a participant from a church school which is important given that gender stereotypes and LGBTQ+ erasure is often linked to religious beliefs. In this study the picture was mixed. This teacher talks about how the school recognises gender stereotypes and positions them as historical constructs that do not fit with modern ideas of gender, however others used religious ideology to insist on gender essentialism. Across the whole of the sample however, including schools that did and did not have religious affiliation, gender inclusive practice was slightly more prevalent than gender binarism. Indeed, I found that 55% of the 279 primary schools in Nottinghamshire had gender-neutral uniforms. However, this does not necessarily mean that a child would feel comfortable wearing any of the options or that everyone in the school would accept disruption to their expectations. However, the existence of the option is a first step removing administrative barriers to gender bound clothing choices. However, this also means that the current DfE School Uniform Guidance has failed to convince 45% of schools that they should ensure equity for all pupils in their

uniform policy. Instead, it has allowed them to fulfil legislative requirements by including a commitment to vary the policy on request for an individual if the variation is deemed by the school to be reasonable. Thus, LGBTQ+ children may have negative experiences with gender binary policies that split clothing options into two distinct lists. These issues are exemplified in Roscoe's answer:

> "If they wanted to wear something different for any significant period the parents would need to use our complaints procedure and make a formal request to the governors and then it would be considered at a full governors' meeting so that a mutually acceptable solution could be reached" (Roscoe, Teacher)

Notably this interviewee uses the words 'different,' 'complaint', 'formal request' and 'mutually acceptable solution' when responding to a question about what would happen if a child identified outside of the binary. The term 'different' suggests that this is not normal and that the uniform as it stands would be acceptable for everyone, except this 'different' person. The word 'complaint' suggests that this is seen as the person being difficult and arguing about something that should be obvious and acceptable to everyone as it is. Requiring a 'formal request' suggests that wanting anything outside of the heteronormative boundary is considered both serious and problematic by this school. Furthermore, the idea of a 'mutually acceptable' solution suggests that someone wanting to wear an item deemed for the 'opposite' sex would be

harmful or distasteful to others in the school community. Such a stance is not limited to one school and this means that choice is limited. These adults might feel they are defending moral or religious rights but their attitude is deliberately exclusionary. Such a stance makes it virtually impossible for a child to do anything other than follow dominant heteronormative expectations and this can be seen to be the aim of those who express such attitudes.

Nevertheless, whilst some schools strongly defended gender binary positions, the interview sample also included many cases where the guidance, equality legislation or other forces, had induced the school to have a gender-neutral policy. These schools had one list of clothes anyone could wear. Ritchie's school was one of those that had chosen an entirely gender-neutral uniform:

> "It's a sweatshirt, polo shirt and black trousers or skirt. They can have the logo on and most have that on the sweatshirt but not on the other items because the parents tend to buy a jumper from school and the rest from Asda or Morrisons" (Ritchie, Teacher)

This quote shows how easy it is for schools to have a gender-neutral uniform policy that does not marginalise anyone. At this school there is a recognition that uniform has many implications for children and families. The school deliberately seeks to reduce cost and allow children to style their bodies in the way they choose whilst the school maintaining a uniform policy that

homogenises appearance. There are no gendered colours, no gendered items of clothing and nothing that has to be bought from a specialist supplier. A number of schools took this approach and this is important because it shows the potential for schools to take an inclusive approach. Of course, this is not to say that heteronormativity does not operate amongst children or adults in this school and I discuss this in more detail later in this analysis. The main point here is that ensuring choice in the uniform policy means that LGBTQ+ children are not marginalised before they even walk through the door. It is a huge step towards including everyone.

In this sample there was one school where the interviewee said:

"We don't have a uniform" (Henry, SLT Teacher)

A school with no school uniform policy is particularly interesting in this study because very few schools in the country have no uniform. I am also aware that since the interview took place the school has introduced uniform. In England most children can expect to wear uniform to school and as far as I am aware this means all primary schools in Nottinghamshire now have a uniform. The majority of those uniforms contain very similar items, conforming to a largely historical expectation of what is smart and appropriate for school, for example leather shoes rather than trainers and polo shirts which have collars rather than t-shirts which do not. Uniforms in many schools differ only

in colour and those colours are also repeated across numerous schools. The responses of interviewees in this study suggest that if the children from the schools were lined up with the school logos covered it would be hard to identify which schools they attended or whether they all came from the same one. There is a homogeneity which extends beyond the boundary of the school gates. Thus, there is effectively no choice for parents because even though all of the schools indicated that they made families aware of the expectations for uniform before the children started at the school and thus in their view, the families were happy with the uniform, there was actually no choice. In some cases, families had even signed home-school agreements that confirmed their agreement to support and comply with the school's policy. Roscoe claimed:

> "They all wear the uniform without exception. Families sign up to that in the home-school agreement when they start so parents are fully aware of our expectations" (Roscoe, Teacher)

All of the interviewees were asked about how they communicated uniform expectations to families, whether or not children complied with the rules and if they ever tried to subvert the uniform policy. The responses were very similar with participants suggesting that it was rare for a child not to comply with the policy. The schools felt that where this did occur it was not because the child wanted to flout or change the rules but rather was due to circumstances beyond their control. Isla's testimony is typical:

"I think because of the age that they are, you know, sometimes you will see the old worn in pair of jeans or joggers they've come in and they're, you know, their clothes from home that day. That doesn't happen very often but I think there's normally a reason, they've not been in the house where the uniform is, or you know whatever but it's not usually a general concern" (Isla, Teaching Assistant and Office Administrator)

None of the participants expressed concern about such incidents and felt they were likely to be limited in timescale. They repeated that parents preferred having uniform and wanted their children to wear it. When asked about how they informed parents about the school's expectations regarding uniform, interviewees responded that their uniform policy was published on their website, in their prospectus and was discussed in meetings with families prior to admission, with some caveats due to Covid-19 safe working practices. The school representatives all saw this as evidence that families were happy with the choices on offer. Gloria and Lucy's statements, respectively, typify the position all of the schools had taken:

"We have information that goes out in the new starter pack when pupils start, about the uniform we expect them to wear. We have a leaflet that the logo-ed uniform can be bought from the uniform shop but they can buy the plain green as well and that's usually conveyed at the parents' open evenings and the starter packs when they come and we have new starter letters when children join us from other schools. Also, we

have the discussion with parents about the uniform" (Gloria, Teaching Assistant)

"Obviously, it's on our website and when they are looking around and through our policies and prospectus and meetings" (Lucy, Teaching Assistant)

However, saying that the policy is consistent and that everyone knows the boundaries prior to, and during their time in school does not stop the policy being exclusionary to some children. For example, gender binary policies still benefit those who are cis gender whilst marginalising or erasing some LGBTQ+ identities. This creates a problem because despite the assumption that families have agreed to and are therefore happy with the options available, they effectively have no choice. Even if parents were to scour the uniform lists of all schools in the locality and found a school with alternative options, they would have to apply to the county council and be granted a place. They would then need to be able to take their child to and collect them from that school each day, all of which assumes there is an adult available with the means, such as a car, to enable this. Therefore, there are both social class and gendered restrictions on choice. At schools with gender-neutral policies LGBTQ+ children and families do not have to face these concerns thus the policy pre-empts and avoids their subjugation.

5.3 Theme 2: Binaries

Across the sample schools there were schools with gender binary uniform policies and those with gender-neutral uniform policies. However, all of the schools had gender-neutral PE kits. Every interviewee said their kit was the same for all children. Rachel and Gloria typify the statements made:

> "No, it's all the same [for] boys' and girls', black joggers and a white polo shirt, they don't have the badge on or anything. Then if they want to, black shorts. We're not very strict, they wear whatever they want really. As long as they're taking part in PE that's what important isn't it?" (Rachel, Teacher)

> "PE kit is dark grey shorts or black or leggings or tracksuit bottoms with a white polo shirt" (Gloria, Teaching Assistant)

It is interesting that whilst some schools felt that girls and boys were different and should wear different clothes for school in general, their ideas of what physically active children needed was considerably different. This suggests that they are aware of the restrictive nature of the heteronormative girl clothing items. For example, that skirts and dresses may restrict movement or be deemed revealing and inappropriate because they may reveal underwear when jumping or doing handstands. All of these schools felt that active children were all the same, they needed to be comfortable and safe from a health and safety perspective they did not need to enact gender roles.

However, this was not the case when schools took children swimming. It appeared that Leisure Centres enforced gender binary policies for all swimmers regardless of the school's policy, the centre staff would not allow anyone who broke those rules to get into the pool. Eileen and Rachel explained the problem:

> "It says [Name of Leisure Centre] require full swimming costume for girls and swimming trunks for boys not boardshorts. They stipulate that. If they have anything else they can't go swimming it actually says that. That's the information laid down by the Leisure Centre not by us so they have to follow that to go swimming" (Eileen, SENCO)

> "The girls have to wear a costume and the boys have to wear shorts, like tight swim shorts. I think it comes from the Leisure Centre they are really strict on what you wear. They will stop them swimming if they don't have the correct swimwear" (Rachel, Teacher)

Interestingly these quotes were the only time anyone said boys should wear something tight. All other discussion of fitted clothing was in relation to the impact on girls. It is not clear why swim shorts would not be acceptable as swimwear since boardshorts and other swim shorts are worn by many people to swim outside school swimming lessons. Equally a bikini or tankini are swimwear and do not provide any health and safety concerns. Anything other than a full swimsuit is seen as sexualising young girls but this does not explain why for boys swimming trunks were preferred. Again, this could be

linked to historical expectations of what is appropriate as similar rules exist for competitive swimming and diving disciplines in the wider world. These regulations are constructions of 'appropriate for boys' and 'appropriate for girls' (Butler, 1993). They are also another example of legitimisation as the schools knowingly perpetuate heteronormative hegemony saying "they will stop them", "they're strict". Yet, when questioned it seemed that none of the schools who made these claims had actually challenged the Leisure Centre policies. Given leisure centres are subject to the same equality and human rights legislation as schools, a centre cannot, and should not, discriminate against people with protected characteristics in this way. However, whilst the leisure centre policies, as described by the schools, only allow for binary gender, when the general public use those swimming pools anyone can go into the changing room and wear the swimwear that they feel best fits their gender identity. As far as I am aware, and I worked in inclusion in the fitness industry in this county, none of the centres tell someone which changing room to go in or what their swimwear should look like when they come through the door. Thus, whilst their policies do not explicitly include trans or non-binary people, they do not exclude them either. That said, Inclusion officers are working with centres across the county to help address these issues so that moving towards all centres have changing villages with full cubicles that can be used by anyone rather than 'male' and 'female' showers and changing. This also enables them to respond to gender discrimination and safety concerns regarding issues such as baby-changing, parents with children,

people with carers and cultural needs. Either way, leisure centre policy is a different situation to a school gender binary uniform policy and the schools are complicit in telling the centre this child is a girl and this child is a boy and allowing them to insist on a certain type of swimwear attached to that construction of gender.

Away from the discussion surrounding swimwear, interviewees spoke of other outside pressures that they felt perpetuated gender norms but which they felt they had no control over. They identified differences in design, fabric, and style between 'clothes for girls' and 'clothes for boys' provided by retailers. Interviewees such as Eileen pointed out a number of common issues:

> "I always find boys have baggier clothes. I always think girls are more fitted, and straight, whereas at home, like my daughter wears more loose trousers, like jeggings but not jeggings, and then they're much more fitted there isn't so much of a choice whereas with the boys always have looser ones they're not really having tight fitting trousers and the same with school shoes. Boys school shoes are much more robust than girls' shoes yet they're all going out to play at the same time. And I've always found that, boys would have reinforced toes and things if you went to Clarks or wherever you go to and the girls would have buckles or Velcro and then they'd get scuffed and ruined quicker

than the boys' shoes. They just presume that girls are not going to be running around as much" (Eileen, SENCO)

Much research has been undertaken with regard to these issues with children, parents, charities and even Members of Parliament campaigning for change as such ideas clearly disadvantage girls. Change however, appears to be very slow. Furthermore, for some schools in this study it was not that they felt that heteronormativity was enforced by forces outside of their control but rather that they failed to grasp what gender-neutral uniform policy actually meant. This is, perhaps, an indication of the power of heteronormative thinking. These school representatives felt that since girls were allowed to wear trousers their duty was done. Ash said:

> "Now I would say that it's gender-neutral now anyway because the girls can wear trousers it's the one thing we've never had a boy that wants to wear a skirt, so I think it's neutral as it is" (Ash, School, Business Manager)

Thus, for schools such as Ash's, making the uniform neutral meant ensuring equality for girls rather than equity for everyone. This was a feature of a number of interviews where participants legitimised their stance with the words 'we've never had'. It is impossible to know whether they genuinely had never had anyone who was gender questioning in school or whether they had simply never had anyone request a variation on these grounds. Nevertheless gender-neutral uniform is not the same as a gender binary uniform that allows

girls to wear trousers. Whilst the later solves some issues for girls, it does not provide equity because it does not make provision for all LGBTQ+ children. This suggests that there is a need to educate schools so that they recognise what gender-neutral uniform actually is and why it is important.

In terms of disadvantage for girls, some interviewees insisted that girls preferred to wear skirts and dresses. Such gender norms and stereotypes are evident in Solly, Eileen and Jill's accounts:

> "The girls like their skirts some do wear trousers, you know, and things like that and then of course, in the summer, the girls want to wear like the summer dresses and things like that" (Solly, Teaching Assistant)

> "You could say certain girls that are more like you can't really say tomboyish but that like physical activities outside at playtime would wear trousers" (Eileen, SENCO)

> "You do tend to find the girls like the white tops and in the summer [time] you'll often find that the girls tend to go for the gingham they'll have that as a dress or the skirt" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

Butler (2007, p.137) calls this ritualized 'girling', because 'girls' are assumed to wish to, and are encouraged to embody certain features of what is perceived as femininity. This reproduces those expectations and perpetuates

heteronormativity as is shown in these interviews. It is necessary to reinscribe these ideas as transgressive in order to move to an understanding of gender that does not limit code children, or adults, as feminine or masculine according to their clothing.

A sense of decorum also haunted the narratives. Interviewees commented on the aspects of their uniform policy that related to personal presentation. Roscoe and Rachel's schools were typical of the myriad of rules schools had:

"As a school our policy states that we reserve the right to deem what constitutes appropriate appearance and a smart and practical hairstyle for school. They can't have anything outlandish or distracting…we only allow one pair of small stud earrings and no other jewellery is allowed but they may wear a sensible watch if they want to. We don't allow fancy headbands and bows, make up, false nails or nail varnish. They have to look appropriate for school" (Roscoe, Teacher)

"You can only wear one pair [of earrings]. [They are] Not allowed to wear necklaces or bracelets. You can wear a watch. You're not allowed, like, completely, you know, out-there hairstyles, like crazy designs are discouraged…because sometimes if you have extreme hair style it can be distracting in lessons or it can make you, can make them stand out and children might comment and then they might get

upset and so that's why really… but we're certainly not a school who would send them home for it until they'd been to the hairdressers or barbers" (Rachel, Teacher)

Whilst a school saying that necklaces and bracelets and dangly earrings could be viewed as a reasonable health and safety precaution, the notion that the number of earrings a person has in their ear or the hairstyle that they would be distracting in classrooms are typically linked to historical ideas of race and social class (Reay, 2012; Skeggs, 2007). These incorrect and insulting assumptions that working class people could be recognised by multiple piercings, tattoos, non-natural hair colours that such families would be chaotic and that children from these families would need the help of school to learn discipline in order to better themselves (Skeggs, 2007; Wood and Warin, 2014). Similarly, afros, dreadlocks and other cultural hairstyles have similarly been deemed a threat to control due to insulting and racist ideologies. Butler (1990) talked about performativity and these schools are deliberately teaching children to be what they consider 'good' and 'appropriate' and perpetuate these stereotypes in addition to the gendered assumptions of what it is to be a 'boy' or 'girl'. When interviewees spoke of times when children in their classes had done things in ways that did not fit with these historical notions of 'appropriate for school' they reported either that the other children did not notice or that they were intrigued. It could be said that children being intrigued by another child not looking exactly the same as them was problematic because they have been taught, implicitly or explicitly to query, or even fear

diversity. One teacher's recount of a situation in her classroom on the week of the interview demonstrates this and appears to support the other schools' concerns. Eileen reported:

> "Like one of my children had a very extreme hairstyle it's like a very spiky long hairstyle which has caused a bit of a problem in the classroom. I need to mention it to the office and say is there any policy on hairstyle because it's causing a bit of a discussion when that child comes in and is disrupting the learning slightly but his mum's a hairdresser so … would they make a fuss of girl having an extreme hairstyle you see I don't know if it's just because he's a boy" (Eileen, SENCO)

In this particular example the child is doing something perceived as 'other' by the school. This time it is about gender norms. This child is a boy who has long, spiky hair. However, there is actually nothing strange in that, it is his hair styled as he likes it. The other children are said to have a problem but this is not necessarily because they think he is 'weird'. They simply do not expect diversity because they are used to homogeneity. It may be that they are impressed because he has the courage to do something they have not or they have may only just realised this is a possibility and that means it could also be possible for them. It is important that children learn that there are many ways of being for all of society to be tolerant and inclusive because we live in a diverse society and there is nothing to fear in including everyone exactly as

they are. Children do not need to be indoctrinated in hate towards anyone who does not look exactly the same, rather they need to learn acceptance. Interestingly, the same teacher reported that some other children in their class had also challenged implicit norms in the classroom with different results:

> "Saying that though one of my girls, no two of my girls have started to wear long shorts actually. Smart ones. I'm not sure if it is on the list about smart shorts. I didn't mention it and none of the children mentioned it. Well, it's not actually on the list about shorts thinking about it but that's because the list went out in September. But it was it was proper tailored shorts, proper grey ones but it wasn't like it was just casual. I know one is my tall girl because she's got very long legs so it stands out quite a lot" (Eileen, SENCO)

These children felt able to challenge gender norms and it did not create a problem. The teacher reported "I didn't mention it and none of the children mentioned it". This is interesting because this a Church school with a gender-neutral uniform policy these children clearly have parents or carers who support them doing identity whatever way they choose and the children feel confident to do this. Such acceptance of individuality is important for an inclusive society, be that with regard to gender, race or social class. Indeed, Butler (1993) suggests that heteronormative hegemony only exists because it is allowed to exist. As was shown in some of the narratives in this study, where consent was removed, children had the opportunity to do things

differently, some chose to, and this was accepted by those around them. Gender-neutral school uniform policies allowed stereotypes to be challenged and enabled inclusion and respect for all.

5.4 Theme 3: Denial

During the interviews, the interviewees without exception denied that they had or had previously had, any children in school who identified as trans or non-binary. Gloria and Isla's responses were typical:

> "No, we haven't had any pupils who have come to us or parents that have come to us. No" (Gloria, Teaching Assistant)

> "Not to my knowledge" (Isla, Teaching Assistant and Office Administrator)

Given the way in which media narratives and public policies treat trans and non-binary people, it is not surprising that schools either did not have, or were unaware of any child in their school identifying in this way. Some were very direct 'no', others more tentative 'not to my knowledge'. However, the legitimisation of a gender binary policy by saying no one asked for change does not make that policy any less exclusionary. Furthermore, some participants made statements that were transphobic. Roscoe carefully worded this response as a collective rather than personal view:

"I think there are some parents, and possibly some staff, definitely governors, who would be alarmed if a boy wore a skirt…some see it as a 'woke' agenda that doesn't fit with the beliefs of our church" (Roscoe, Teacher)

This shows that this interviewee was aware that the policy was exclusionary. In his testimony he passes the blame for transphobia to religious ideology. He also said 'our church' which further denotes his awareness of other views and the segregation of people implying some people belong and others do not. The narrative made it clear that the school believed any gender performance outside of the binary would be considered "wrong" and that the school would not accept any challenge. This is important because queer theory suggests that everybody has some access to power, albeit contested and available in different amounts to different people depending on the circumstances. For children who attend schools such as Roscoe's where gender binary uniform is policed by the staff, children have very little power. They are forced to 'do' gender in line with gender norms unless they can convince an adult to request a variation for them.

It was interesting that several interviewees who had stated that they did not have any non-binary children later went on to describe situations where children could be said to be gender questioning. Lisbeth's testimony perhaps crystallised the problem:

"I haven't had any formal approach from anybody erm to suggest they might have made that choice, however there are indications when we had shows and things that children might identify other than their gender but it's not been an issue because it's an infant school, children dress up all the time in different things so any change is not really a huge concern" (Lisbeth, Headteacher)

It was common for interviewees to frame trans and non-binary identities in this way, as a choice and as something that a young child would not understand. In suggesting that the children do not understand, these participants both imply that questioning gender is not 'normal' and that children's choices should be overridden by those of an adult. That said, some interviewees responses indicated that they were fearful of being accused of going against a child's wishes but were equally fearful of affirming their choices in case it made their lives harder. Some participants even felt that the school would be judged negatively for being 'woke' or 'converting children.' Lisbeth reported a catalogue of errors when she spoke of an incident at her school:

"Erm, one of my staff erm was particularly agitated by erm one of the girls who didn't want to be basically a fairy princess in the show and the parents asked if she could join the boys' line. The teacher particularly has girls' lines and boys' lines still and mostly it doesn't come up, it just happened to be that was how she had developed this show and that was a big issue and we had a long discussion about how to conform to

this. I had the discussion with parents and the teacher. The teacher was actually most resistant because it ruined her show rather than, sadly she didn't consider it from the child's point of view and that was something we had to work through and explain and her belief was that parents would think she other parents would think she picked out the child and put them in the other line. In actual fact it wasn't an issue. The child wore erm sort of sparkly leggings but still took part in the girls' line as a compromise. We didn't want her to get bullied by other children for being different. The parents might have seen it as us being difficult" (Lisbeth, Headteacher)

In this example, the interviewee describes the teacher as 'agitated' about how another human expresses their gender despite the fact that the child's expression of gender has absolutely no consequence or effect on that teacher, their identity or their life. Butler suggested that:

For the question of whether or not a position is right, coherent, or interesting, is in this case, less informative than why it is we come to occupy and defend the territory we do, what it promises us and from what it promises to protect us" (Butler, 1995, p.127).

This teacher is defending heteronormativity, the definitions of gender that she feels comfortable and the way she likes to work. She expects girls to want to be fairy princesses. The headteacher say that 'Sadly she [the teacher] didn't consider the child's point of view' yet the headteacher did not use her power

to enable the child's wishes. Rather, the child's feelings are overridden by an adult who has greater power. The 'compromise' basically allows the teacher to continue enforcing gender norms and does not really change anything for the child. Furthermore, the school says they did not want the child to get bullied yet do not consider that the teacher is effectively bullying the child into complying with their perception of gender. Nor do they consider that the school working with all of the children on accepting all ways of being might have been a more positive way forward. The compromise simply reproduces heteronormative gender norms and casts the child as 'an exception'. The situation is harmful to all of the children because they see that you can be included or excluded on the basis of your gender and your clothes and that adults support this.

However, another school did try to be an ally to LGBTQ+ children and enable gender flexibility. Coleen reported:

> "Her mum has told us she wants to be a boy but mum dresses her as a girl. So, when mum talks about her, when we talk about her, it's a girl. But if we say boys go and line-up she will and we don't challenge it" (Coleen, Teaching Assistant)

The other children, and the staff, accepted this child's knowledge of themselves. They all respected the child's choice to do the things that felt right

to them. However, this excerpt also shows that schools need more support regarding how to address gender when the parents' opinion differs from that of the child. This is one of the reasons that gender-neutral uniform policies can help schools, because if there is no gender binary then no one can be seen to be acting outside of it and no one can be accused of trying to change anybody. There were other schools in the study that had also made an effort to be allies to LGBTQ+ children. Whilst these schools denied direct experience, they were sympathetic to the issues they felt it could raise for a child, and thought that their school would be able to offer support. Lucy said:

> "No, they haven't. But I think if a child wants to do that, obviously it would be supported and we wouldn't have any issue with that" (Lucy, Teaching Assistant)

Jill went a step further adding:

> "The girls can wear the trousers. To be honest the way that our school is if a family approached the school and made that request for a boy that it would be accommodated and with the kind of school, we are we would also talk to the class about it is acceptable and reinforce antibullying about not picking on or leaving anybody out so I think it would be addressed within the nature of the school but to my knowledge we've never had anybody come and request that. It wouldn't be ruled out of hand" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

Yet the last statement 'wouldn't be ruled out of hand' does suggest that it could have been. Certainly, in this study there were schools where that was quite likely to be the case. Nevertheless, the positive responses show that it is possible, where there is an impetus, for schools to consider inclusive practice. Ritchie explained:

> "We don't [have anyone who identifies as trans or non-binary] but we have talked about it as part of our topics 'About Me' and personal relationships because we have got some staff who are LGBT, not trans specifically but gay and lesbian and some families who are so we've made sure that children know there are all types of people and all types of relationships and they're all normal and all welcome here so I hope if there was a child who was questioning that they would feel they could come to us and feel safe. I hope so anyway". (Ritchie, Teacher)

His narrative exemplifies the significant impact that direct teaching and whole school action can have and it is hoped that the new curriculum guidance, together with the uniform legislation this thesis calls for, leads to this being the case in all schools.

5.5 Theme 4: Change

Across all of the interviews school representatives shared positive views of their school uniform policies. They felt that their uniforms provided an array of

benefits for children and their families. On the whole, the uniform policies had been in operation in school for decades. They were said to have arisen from the school listening to and taking on board the views of all stakeholders, teachers, governors, pupils, and families, in their design and implementation. Ash's testimony is representative of many whole school policy approaches, whilst Gloria provides an example of the methods schools talked about using to include children in the decision-making process:

> "It was a competition years ago, and the children and the staff got together and decided to change the uniform into the colours and the design that they came up with and one of the children designed the logo…it was a long time, I would say probably about 20 years ago" (Ash, School Business Manager)

> "We do have an option for children to wear shirts and ties. That was something the student parliament brought in a few years ago. We made that as an option. But that's, none of them wear ties now, but we have got that as an option if they want to wear ties" (Gloria, Teaching Assistant)

It is notable that at Gloria's school, and a number of others, the school parliament could make changes to the uniform policy. Thus, if a child or children felt comfortable in asking, this was a way the uniform could have been changed from the largely historical social norms that standardised them across schools. Here the children wanted a tie but this could reasonably be

any item of clothing the children felt strongly about. Given that from a Queer Theory perspective their ideas would be assumed to arise from the influences around them as children see more diversity in the world around them, they may come to request more diversity in their uniform options. These schools wanted the children to have their views listened to and implemented. They were also willing to keep an option open even though no one takes it up anymore. This kind of flexibility could also be demonstrated by schools in relation to providing gender-neutral uniform for everyone regardless of whether anyone is currently making use of that flexibility.

However, children did not always get a say and in some cases neither did the parents. The headteacher at Gladys' school had made the decision alone:

> "I know that there was some objections from parents because the one before had a like Latin motto on it and some of the parents weren't happy the school got rid of the motto" (Gladys, School Office Manager)

This was another common feature of the interviews, participants talking about the adult stakeholders wanting to keep the uniforms they had. They said there were concerns about wanting children to 'look smart', 'look appropriate for school' and in Gladys' case, about a Latin motto. This shows how powerful discourses of social class remain in school. In the past, going to school was a way of 'bettering' oneself and rising out of poverty. The wearing of uniform

conveyed the ability to go to school and removed the element of competitive dressing theoretically making all children equal at least in terms of appearance. Latin similarly was seen as a mark of the upper classes. The fact that these influences still affect uniform choice demonstrate that notions of social class are still dominant in England. Whilst wearing a suit, or the equivalent in uniform, does not change the status of a person many schools cling onto this form of control and the associated notions of becoming 'better' through education. The willingness of the parents in one example and governors in the other to fight for shirts or Latin mottos in school uniform whilst not contesting the options available to girls and LGBTQ+ pupils shows that they will and do fight for things they believe are important but that gender equity was not, in these particular cases, seen as an issue.

Many interviewees said that their school's uniform policy had been in place for decades or more, and some said that was before their time and this reflects the previous discussion about the historical norms of uniform. Roscoe, Coleen and Jill respectively, presented typical accounts of the longevity of policies:

> "A very long time ago I would say at least twenty years" (Roscoe, Teacher)

"It hasn't changed for ages, not since I've been there. My twenty-one-year-old went there as well and he had the same uniform" (Coleen, Teaching Assistant)

"It's always been that uniform. I'm assuming that the green came from the [name], you know, in keeping with the trees, and the wooded area. My son is leaving school this year, he started off at [school name] and he's at secondary school and it's always been the same uniform" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

These narratives claiming the school uniform policies have not changed in decades are in direct contrast to the written policies published by the schools which claim that they are reviewed annually. The discrepancy suggests that when schools reviewed their uniform policy the school staff and governors looked at what they already had and thought that it was fine and it met the needs of all of the pupils in its present form. Isla's testimony was typical of the answer interviewees gave when questioned about this:

"I think it's a nice uniform, the colours go well together and they look smart. I think there's something for everybody in the uniform that we have" (Isla, Teaching Assistant and Office Administrator)

However, this does not mean that all stakeholders were completely unaware of the potential of other approaches. Some of the interviewees actually

mentioned this is in their testimonies. Lisbeth described the challenges her school had faced and the solutions they had found a few years previously:

> "We did change a few years ago from shirts, long sleeve shirts and buttons and it was my governors really who were the people who were unsure about the change. They wanted the traditional image. They felt wearing a shirt and tie was part of going to school. It made them sort of important, made the children important and the school look in the image they wanted it to be. I particularly wanted to move away from them as did my staff and to some extent we were supported in the fact that the local supermarkets had gone over to supporting schools by making specific uniforms for each school and my colleagues in you know our group of schools all went to polo shirts" (Lisbeth, Headteacher)

Notably, Lisbeth talks about the 'traditional image' and that the uniform 'made the children important.' Again, this is to do with social class. There is actually no aspect of wearing a shirt and tie that makes a person important it is a social construct, a meaning that has been ascribed to that clothing in the same way as wearing a skirt has been inscribed as 'feminine'. In both cases it is fabric on a body. There is no meaning in that and thus if meaning is constructed it can be deconstructed and new meanings can be ascribed to those items (Butler, 2004). Nevertheless, it seemed that change was possible if there was enough impetus for it. In Lisbeth's case the staff and

supermarkets had overcome the resistance of the governors. This was also seen in other testimonies. Often a change of headteacher was the catalyst for uniform change but interviewees also indicated other contributing factors, interestingly none of which were related to gender equality. Gladys claimed the new headteacher had unilaterally decided change was needed and Ritchie reported that the school was looking for a whole new start:

> "Now I started here this is my sixteenth year and then there was a new Headteacher that year and the uniform had changed. I don't know why she changed it. I don't know if she was just making her mark" (Gladys, School Office Manager)

> "The same [uniform] for everybody throughout the school. It's quite a new school, it used to have a lot of problems with Ofsted and a really old building and issues with its reputation…we got a new building and a new uniform. It was a deliberate break from the past new beginnings really and it's just gone from strength to strength really, we have great kids and the parents and carers are supportive and locally people want their kids to come here now" (Ritchie, Teacher)

Thus, it seemed that most schools did not think their policy needed to change. However, they would change their policy to alter collective identity when they felt it was important to do so. Thus, those who had retained gender binary uniform policies were either unaware or unwilling to change their uniform policies to ensure gender equity particularly for LGBTQ+ children.

Overall, the interviews showed that powerful and majority voices were needed to change the status quo and that these voices were simply not either present, or not powerful enough to support LGBTQ+ supportive practice in many schools. LGBTQ+ children represent a particularly vulnerable minority, thus their needs appeared not to be a priority, or a concern. I read all of the 279 Nottinghamshire Primary Schools' published school uniform policies. Table 5.1 below shows the number of Nottinghamshire primary schools with each type of policy in 2020. The reality is that current DfE school uniform guidance (DfE, 2013), legislation such as the Equality Act (2010) had failed to have a noticeable impact on this situation. Only 55% of Nottinghamshire primary schools had a gender-neutral policy and thus could be said to be allies to LGBTQ+ children. Many also disadvantaged girls because even where they had the option of trousers in the policy there remained an expectation that they would prefer a skirt or dress. These findings demonstrate that there is not enough impetus for change at present. Thus, there is a need for immediate effective legislation to ensure that compulsory heteronormativity is not perpetuated.

Table 5.1 Nottinghamshire Primary School Uniform Policy Classification

Totals, 2020.

Type of Policy	Number of Schools	% Schools (279)
Gender-neutral	152	55%
Gender binary	126	45%
No uniform	1	<1%

5.6 Theme 5: Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic which began in March 2020 was, temporarily, a completely unforeseen catalyst to uniform change. One of the most heartening themes arising from the interviews was that of schools instantly changing their policy and practice to accommodate new needs. Admittedly these were needs created by a killer virus sweeping the population but it proved that uniform policy could be changed instantly when there was a will to do so. Overnight, schools dropped their insistence on uniform and told children to come in their own clothes every day. Rachel's testimony was indicative of the message from all of the interviewees:

> "They didn't wear uniform during covid because we wanted them to
> wear clean clothes everyday" (Rachel, Teacher)

It is interesting to note that schools felt children did not own enough uniform to wear a new set of clothes each day. Given that all of the schools' written policies said that school uniform helps remove the burden of dressing for low-income families, these interviewees make it clear in the comments about Covid-19, that many families cannot afford a lot of uniform. A national crisis meant that arguments about uniform being a great leveller, being required to regulate behaviour and of helping at risk children wear durable and appropriate clothes, were dropped. Schools remembered that children have clothes they wear when not at school, even if the family has little money. They also showed they trusted families to send them in clean and appropriate clothes for school which is in direct contrast to the interviewees' earlier comments about the need for strict school uniform policies in school. The interviewees in this study also admitted that removing the requirement to wear uniform had no impact on behaviour or cohesion in school during that time. Rachel said:

"It didn't have any impact on their behaviour or anything but it has just been a really weird time" (Rachel, Teacher)

Thus, the uniform could be changed, all stakeholders could quickly agree and make sweeping changes when they wanted to. Yet, interestingly, they all still hung on to dominant social norms in that the instant all of the children came back into school the uniform policy was reinstated. Queer Theory suggests that this is because there is always a tendency to recuperation of a dominant

social norm and that for these to be overcome there has to be consistent and continual work to dismantle the norm. With school uniform the dismantling of the norm did not continue once the impetus of Covid-19 restrictions was removed. Gladys' response was typical:

> "When we were in lockdown the Keyworker children didn't wear uniform but when we were all back in, they still came in uniform" (Gladys, School Office Manager)

However, some schools were keeping some of the changes for a little longer. It was noticeable that these were the ones for which Covid-19 continued to be the impetus, a new normal:

> "Anyway, because of lockdown they have to actually come in their PE kit they can't get changed at school because we can't have things coming in and out so that's been a bit tricky as well. It's an anomaly" (Eileen, SENCO)

> "There'll be the odd occasion at the end of term with COVID when children have grown out of their shoes, they send them in something else because at least they know that they'll fit because no one knows how long it's going to be before the next lockdown" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

Even in schools where the uniform had returned by the time the interviews took place participants pointed out that some aspects of their policy were

more lenient than before. Schools showed empathy for the ongoing effects of lockdowns and restrictions. It is interesting that there is empathy for the impact of a killer virus on children but not for the harm, including mental distress, self-harm and suicide, caused to children by heteronormative and racist policies. I suggest that this is because the pandemic affected everybody and thus everybody had to consider it. This difference in response suggests that some lives are seen to matter more than others and that harm is judged on how many people are perceived to be harmed. In these interviews endemic heteronormativity allowed participants to legitimise their thoughts and actions and avoid the consideration of anything else (Butler, 1993). Therefore, these narratives serve to support the notion that schools could support children and families through different uniform expectations but that there is currently not enough impetus for change. This study is important because it will help schools to recognise the impact their uniform policies have on LGBTQ+ children so that they understand why change is needed and are incited to enact meaningful change.

5.7 Theme 6: Belonging

All of the interviewees said that school uniform fostered a sense of belonging for children. Each of the fifteen interviewees mentioned belonging in their testimony. Coleen, Roscoe and Lisbeth's words respectively typify the response:

"I think it gives your child a sense of belonging. Because they're part of something, they see everybody else in the class in the same uniform" (Coleen, Teaching Assistant)

"It also has an important role to play in developing a sense of belonging and community amongst all of our children" (Roscoe, Teacher)

"They belong. This is their school. This is important. When we go anywhere, we expect them to look smart and say this is our school this is important to us these are our bricks that hold us together" (Lisbeth, Headteacher)

The words used here matter. According to these interviewees 'everyone' feels they belong, 'everybody' wears the same and the uniform 'holds us together'. These responses suggest that the way a person looks tells others whether or not that person is a part of the group but that does not account for other aspects of personhood which have been shown to affect the perception of an individual belonging. For example, the dialect used by a person may lead to others defining them as being from the same local area or being from a certain social background. Uniform does not remove these aspects of personhood so it is idealistic to suggest that it acts as a panacea for belonging. Nevertheless, all of the representatives in this study felt that uniform made children feel happy, accepted and supported by their peers. They believed in their approach:

"All the children respect each other's uniform, they don't make any comments if anyone's got something different on like a cardigan from one shop and someone else's got a logo top no one makes a fuss about it. It goes to that Christian ethos, because we're all equal and you know, God's children so it helps to promote that we are all equal" (Eileen, SENCO)

It appears that heterosexual staff and governors are using the concept of belonging without considering the impact of their school uniform policies on everybody. Looking at Butler's (1993) heterosexual hegemony and performativity, it could be suggested that uniform is only believed to be inclusive because the 'smart well-behaved pupil', 'school boy' and 'school girl' identities have been forced, by school uniform policies to be repeated in schools for a long time. Therefore, the norms have been brought into existence through the doing and naming of such doing. The issue is as discussed in earlier themes that this 'belonging' is exclusive. When asked about whether children would feel that they belonged if they were LGBTQ+, the interviewees said they felt they would, even in cases where the policy of the school appeared transphobic. The majority felt that making variations to policy and reinforcing anti-bullying messages if and when a child, or family, requested it was enough to ensure that everyone felt they were welcome, safe and belonged in their school.

5.8 Theme 7: Social Class

It was clear that schools felt that the greatest uniform issue that faced their children was financial. They believed that it was vital that all children wore clothes that defined them as members of the school but recognised that because some families were already struggling financially it could be difficult for them to provide full, labelled uniforms, at all times, particularly when their children were growing quickly and where families had multiple children. Lisbeth crystallised the views of many of the interviewees when she said:

> "By having a specific school uniform from a deal with the local supermarket all children are able to purchase it and we can support that by doing deals with them so that we can support parents who might find it a challenge and so the children all look the same, are all the same from that point of view when they come through the door" (Lisbeth, Headteacher)

The schools had tried a variety of strategies to help, including reducing the number of logo-ed items required, provision of vouchers and in-school second-hand uniform shops. However, many of these practices had been temporarily suspended at the time of the interviews due to Covid-19 safety. Jill was one of many representatives whose school had taken a proactive approach:

"Families with multiple children in school, one family I know they've got four children, and so we want to make uniform so it's accessible and affordable whilst keeping the look of the school so I think the way we've got it where you don't have to have the logo on I think it fits in with anyone, those that want the logo can have it, even those who can afford the logo sometimes it's easier to pick a couple of packs of tops up than it is to go to the school suppliers…pre-Covid the PTA used to collect outgrown uniforms and on a Friday they used to have a stall up and sell them" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

Coleen's school was one of a number who had gone even further to ensure that every child had everything that the other children had:

"I do know that if we have any family that we know is struggling that we do provide uniform for them" (Coleen, Teaching Assistant)

This is interesting because these schools clearly care about their children and their circumstances when it comes to finance, yet they do not try to make changes and provide options that support LGBTQ+ children, or gender equity in general. That said, some schools also failed to show any empathy to financial difficulties families might be facing. Valerie spoke about the attitude of the academy trust governing body to the difficulties families had faced getting shoes in the pandemic:

"A few kids were starting to come in trainers so we had a discussion at a governors' meeting. We do want them to wear the black leather shoes except for PE days because its smarter and for the older ones then they're ready for secondary school where it's very strict" (Valerie, Chair of Governors)

In this example it is the academy trust governors who are insisting on the footwear but they are legitimising their position by using the requirements of the linked secondary school. They are using dominant societal expectations of social class in the creation and enforcement of the rules the school has regarding uniform. These governors believe leather shoes are smarter and thus this is their policy regardless of outside influences. It does not take into account the fact that some children might be vegan or that particularly during the pandemic it was not always possible to visit shops to buy specific school shoes. Other schools had similar issues with non-specified footwear being worn but their response was very different. Gladys echoed many others in saying:

"We're relaxed about bags and about footwear so long as its sensible and they aren't going to fall over or they're not strappy sandals because again shoes are expensive so they can wear trainers to school and no one bats an eyelid" (Gladys, School Office Manager)

This is the situation that could be afforded to gender-neutral uniform if schools saw any item of uniform as 'an item of uniform' and thus as appropriate.

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These schools had inscribed bags as bags, footwear as footwear and thus all as acceptable. Butler (1993, p.2) explains these answers as the "the reiterative power of discourse to produce the phenomena that it regulates and constrains". It is a change of mindset towards the items, not a change in the items themselves that is needed.

Only one interviewee felt that uniform was unnecessary. Henry commented that:

> "Children wear clothes out of school anyway so with no uniform they don't need extra clothes or extra expense and it doesn't affect their behaviour or how they interact with one another. I know other schools disagree about some of those things but that's not what we find at our school and so if those schools want uniform that's great but for us not having one works well" (Henry, SLT Teacher)

This is an acknowledgement of the fact that uniform is additional clothing, an extra cost for families, not a reduction of cost. This was recognised by a number of schools in relation to Covid-19 working practices but not with regards to financial burden. It was also notable that this interviewee was aware of the reasons some schools used for having a uniform and specifically mentioned that there was no impact on behaviour. These children were

allowed to choose what clothes they wore and it had no impact on their interactions with each other or their behaviour.

Thus, throughout the interviews, it was clear that most schools felt that having a uniform was key to effective provision and their experiences, in some cases, as parents of primary age children, did not serve to contradict these pre-existing views, but rather, reinforced them. Solly said:

> "I think it's good that it's more accessible now because like everywhere does it and I'm happy especially for mine, they did have a couple of kinds of with the labels with their, with this school like logos on and that was more for if we have special assemblies, I'd send them in and if it was a photograph and things like that. So, I liked that there wasn't the pressure on me spending a lot on a uniform, because they do go through it…when they're so young then they'll come in home and they've drawn on it or is painted on or there's things like that it is a loss of money to just keep spending out" (Solly, Teaching Assistant)

Many schools had used the model of multiple uniform suppliers so that families could mix and match pieces to reduce the overall costs of kitting out their children for school. It was interesting that many still felt, as Solly did, that they would need the 'proper' ones with the school logo on for 'special' occasions. This is linked to ideas of social class and that the family would be

seen as less than if they did not have the 'proper' uniform. Her comments also make important points about all young children and clothes given their arty, messy, physically active lifestyles and rate of growth.

Gender did play a role in the financial aspect of uniform for some families, and when money was the impetus children had the opportunity to use their power to do something different (Butler, 2004). A couple of interviewees mentioned siblings inheriting uniform and how this could alter their presentation, challenging the gender norms in school. Jill's explanation is typical:

> "It's interesting that some of the girls will wear the dark if they've had them passed down but you do tend to find the girls like the white tops" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors)

This follows Butler's (2004) suggestion that children can create gender trouble by challenging the gender stereotypes in the ways that they perform being a boy or girl. In this case, the children are challenging the gender norms of the school by wearing a colour that has been constructed by other people at the school as for boys. These children are driven by their parents not wanting to buy more uniform and not seeing that a dark green top could be masculine or a white one feminine. This is also a demonstration of the fact that gendered meaning has been ascribed to these colours because it is not an intrinsic part of the existence of colour (Butler, 1990). These children have the power to

dress in these clothes that go against the norm at the school because these items are part of the regular uniform and the other children and teachers accept them as such. This is important when arguing for gender-neutral uniform because not only does a policy need to exist but everyone at the school must be open to individuals making use of the options available. If there is a gender-neutral policy but people do not actually believe that the policy is right or appropriate then a child may still not feel comfortable in making use of the policy flexibility. It is notable that this interviewees in this study did not find that other children took issue with children doing things 'a different way'. This shows that there is potential for change to the dominant norms. In society in general there is an increasing visibility of 'code-breaking' garment choice amongst younger generations and this is likely to impact on school uniform over time.

5.9 Summary

In this chapter, the themes arising from the data analysis have told the story of uniform and gender equity amongst participants. Most schools had a uniform and those uniforms were largely the same and thus there was no real choice for pupils. Moreover, gender binaries were obvious and there was a denial of anyone wanting anything else. In fact, most interviewees said there was no need for change. However, during the COVID-19 pandemic many had temporarily forsaken school uniform showing that where and when they

perceived a need for alterations to policy requirements they could and would change their uniform rules. The main reason they felt that having no uniform, as implemented during the pandemic, was not required in the longer term was that they believe that school uniform makes children feel they belong. In the view of these interviewees, school uniform overcomes the issues of social class and means that everyone starts from the same point. They look the same therefore they are equal.

Overall, my analysis of the interview data found that current guidance and legislation does not provide schools with enough knowledge and support to guarantee that every child's needs are recognised, understood, and addressed in school. When asked about what they thought of the policies and legislation the participants ignored the long list of problems outlined in this thesis and reported the successes, mainly focusing on finance and collective identity. Unable to identify the problems of policies that were clearly historically based, they had come to the conclusion that constantly changing or challenging the uniform policy was pointless. They felt that their uniform policy worked as it was.

Within the sample, I found examples of effective practice through which LGBTQ+ children were afforded parity of experience, but I also heard about

situations which fell short of this standard. These situations had the potential to negatively affect the psychological wellbeing of any child identifying outside of the binary, and that of all children, through the persistent and compulsory reproduction of heteronormativity. My analysis revealed that espoused commitments to equality were only available to some children in some contexts and that staff and governors either did not recognise, or chose not to problematise this situation, despite their obvious wish to do the best they could by the children in their care.

In the next chapter I discuss these findings in the light of the research questions.

Chapter 6: What lessons can be drawn from this exploration of gender equity in school policymaking?

In the last chapter I analysed the interviews I undertook with school staff and governors about their uniform policies. In this chapter I draw together the findings explored under various themes to address the overall aims of this thesis. In order to do this, I address each research question in turn.

6.1 To what extent are school uniform policies compliant with the DfE School Uniform Guidance?

First and foremost, it is important to address the issue of guidance and legislation. This study is necessary because at present

> "…there is no legislation in place that deals specifically with school uniform of other aspects of appearance" (DfE, 2013, p.3)

Nevertheless, there exists a culture of school uniform in the United Kingdom and DfE (2013) guidance to support "good practice" in the development of school uniform policies. Thus, most children can reasonably expect to wear uniform when attending school. In the present study, all but one school had uniform. Interviewees universally spoke of the uniform signalling the values of the school within and beyond the school community. Furthermore, some spoke of the importance of their strict uniform standards in socialising children to the expectations of secondary school. Such considerations have long been

reported as the basis of compulsory school uniform in research particularly following the academisation of many schools (Reidy, 2021; Stephenson, 2016). There also exists an almost universal belief in the levelling qualities of school uniform, with the DfE guidance (2013) strongly recommending that schools have a uniform policy on this basis. In this study, school representatives without exception cited the removal of socio-economic difference and prevention of competitive dressing as positive aspects of their school uniform. Many interviewees discussed at length the steps they had taken to ensure to ensure functional, cost-effective uniform was available to all pupils including non-branded supermarket options, second hand uniform sales in school and even free uniform for families facing particular financial hardship. However, whilst such social camouflage is often referenced in the argument for uniform, there is a large body of evidence to suggest that uniform still represents a significant cost for families, particularly those on low incomes and those with larger numbers of school-age children (DfE, 2021b; Reidy, 2021).

The reduction of distraction in the classroom was another cited by interviewees in this study as a factor in the uniform required by the setting. The distraction perceived to arise from children not being dressed in a homogenous way is also referenced in the current DfE (2013) guidance as a positive reason for the existence of uniform in schools. The reduction in

distraction has previously been evidenced in a number of studies including the global PISA study of student experience which found an effect on classroom noise levels, pupil attention and the time taken to settle to work (Baumann and Kriskova, 2016). However, there are multiple other factors that affect the quality of teaching and learning in any given classroom. Furthermore, there is some suggestion that where teaching staff are positioned in opposition to students through the enforcement of uniform there is a detrimental effect on the learning relationship (Reidy, 2021). Nevertheless, despite regular media scrutiny that would suggest a certain level of dissatisfaction and non-compliance with uniform regulations, interviewees claimed that there was no such issue at the schools involved in this study. Participants reported that pupils and families preferred uniform, chose to comply, and that any deviation from policy was short-lived and related to reasons beyond the pupil's control. It appeared that there was a well-established culture of passivity and compliance amongst children and families.

The DfE guidance suggests that health and safety is another factor that schools should consider in the development and enforcement of school uniform policy. However, interestingly, in a global study Reidy (2021) found only one incidence of a health and safety report involving uniform. The report was related to incorrectly applied rules banning jewellery items that had no link to causing harm (*Health and Safety Executive*, 2013). Despite this,

schools involved in my study routinely limited children to one pair of stud

earrings and no other jewellery citing 'health and safety.' It is also notable, on

the subject of health and safety, that whilst research exists demonstrating the

negative impact of binary gender uniform on girls' participation in physical

activity (Happel, 2013; Nathan, McCarthy and Hall et al., 2022), schools did

not view this as due cause for moving to a gender-neutral uniform policy.

However, all of the schools had a unisex kit for physical education. This could

be seen to reflect a heteronormative assumption that girls do not need or want

to be as physically active and thus are not concerned by having movement

constrained by skirts and dresses despite the known risks of lower activity

levels, particularly in childhood. In a study currently being undertaken in

Australian researchers are specifically examining the impact of using the

existing unisex school uniform as the main school uniform in primary schools

in an effort to increase physical activity and improve physical health related

markers amongst primary school pupils (Nathan, McCarthy and Hall et al.,

2022). Thus, it seems particularly important to note that the schools in this

study all already had a single unisex P.E kit in place that allowed for

unrestricted movement and avoided the perpetuation of gender stereotypes.

In Wales, the government recognised the restriction of physical activity that

gender binary uniforms placed upon girls and called it out as a significant form

of gender inequality, furthermore recognising that such binary policies also

marginalised some LGBTQ+ identities. Thus, in Wales, legislation was

implemented to enforce gender-neutral school uniform policies in all schools

(Addysg Cymru, 2019). However, in England, the government decided that these issues did not need to be addressed on a national basis, stating that rather, individual schools were best placed to decide on the most appropriate uniform for their children. As such, no legal uniform mandate exists. The government stance gives the impression that contrary to research, issues of gender inequality and marginalisation are not universal. I argue that this means that many schools continue to specifically exclude some LGBTQ+ identities and perpetuate heteronormativity through gender binary policies. In the present study, I found that in 2021, 45% of Nottinghamshire primary schools had a gender binary school uniform policy. At these schools, the legislation (Equality Act, 2010) that does exist to protect LGBTQ+ people and promote equality for all has been circumnavigated by the schools who merely allow families to request an individual uniform variation for their child on the grounds of a protected characteristic. Therefore, it is a conclusion of this research that whilst school uniform policies comply with the current DfE School Uniform Guidance (2013), the guidance itself is unfit for purpose because it does not ensure equity for all pupils.

6.1.1 Does the uniform policy specify different clothing for boys and girls?

Whilst it is beyond the scope of this thesis to answer this question for the whole country, in this study just less than half of schools specified different

clothing for boys and girls. In most cases this meant girls had the option of a skirt, pinafore and gingham summer dress and boys had the option of trousers or shorts. The majority, but not all, also allowed girls to wear trousers but did not expect boys to want to wear skirts. This was not an oversight during the interviews school staff and governors said this directly. Furthermore, I found that interviewees expressed gender stereotypes that were not always explicit in the written policies. A finding which is consistent with those of a previous study of student and teacher perceptions of gender stereotypes carried out by Gilchrist and Zhang (2022). In my study, gender binarism was apparent in the way different clothing options were valorised for different pupils. Many participants told me that "the girls like their skirts" (Solly, Teaching Assistant) and that "girls like the white tops and boys like the dark ones" (Jill, Vice Chair of Governors). Looking at these findings through the lens of Queer Theory (Butler, 1990) suggests that this means that children attending these schools are growing up in an environment where they are forced to repeat gender performance in line with gender essentialism. The enactment of school policy meant that birth sexed girls were expected to embody dominant socially constructed 'femininities,' and birth sexed boys to embody dominant socially constructed 'masculinities.' Both of which have been evident throughout the history of school uniform in this country (Stephenson, 2021).

6.1.2 Are girls and LGBTQ+ pupils disadvantaged by the policy options they are given?

Given the gendered expectations that the majority of schools professed the study shows that both girls and LGBTQ+ pupils are disadvantaged by the policy options they are given. A number of interviewees raised the issue of girls' styles being fitted in form and girls' shoes being less durable than those intended for boys. Yet such assertions were made with an associated perceived helplessness regarding the elimination of such issues due to the constraints of manufacturing and supply networks. Indeed, Reidy (2021) reports that whilst there has been a significant level of investigation into standardisation of sizing, garment quality and the prioritisation of functionality such as ease of washing, there appears to have been little effort to reduce the disadvantage caused to girls by aspects of garment design and selection. Researchers, teachers, parents, and girls themselves have reported that figure hugging garments objectify the female body with concomitant disadvantage for those with higher body mass (Bragg et al., 2018; Happel, 2013). Girls equally report the need to choose between a 'girly' fitted style of dressing and what is perceived by themselves and others as active 'tomboy' attire and the associated expectations for their behaviour and activity choices (Paechter, 2010; Reay, 2001; Renold, 2005). No such effect has been found in association with boys' uniform. Thus, girls are disproportionately negatively affected by the uniform garments available to them.

Furthermore, at present LGBTQ+ children are disadvantaged when they attend schools with gender binary uniform policies. LGBTQ+ children remain a particularly vulnerable sub-section of society at the present time. Indeed, the charity *Diversity Role Models* (2021a) reports that more than half of children surveyed said that LGBTQ+ children would not feel safe at their school. In this research I found that at present, children who identify outside the binary and wish to dress in a way that feels most comfortable to them must get their parents or carers to make a formal request to the school for an individual policy variation. Neary and Cross (2018) found that this was a source of concern for parents who felt that were judged both about the choices their children made and their decision as parents to support their children regarding their gender identity. Such situations were also reported by Mallen (2021) who reported that parents were unsure of the process and wary of having to present their case to a panel of perceived authority figures. Under the terms of the Equality Act (2010) and the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989), children have the right to have their views listened to and not to be treated differently or discriminated against on the grounds of their gender identity. Requiring a debate about whether a child is allowed to identify as they wish amongst a board of adults who are neither medical professionals nor are guardians of the child should be seen as contravention of both. A gender binary uniform policy therefore creates significant disadvantage. A gender-neutral school uniform policy, on the other hand, means that children and families do not have to go through this process, the child can simply wear

whichever garments they wish. Therefore, an outcome of this research is the knowledge that some of those involved in school policymaking are preventing gender equity. Instead, some school uniform policies serve to inform children that there is a gender binary and that they must perform gender within its constraints in order to be included.

6.2 Can school uniform policies support allyship?

When children are at the early stages of learning about the world, a gender flexible approach with a gender-neutral uniform policy begins the journey of allyship for both teachers and children. There has traditionally been a perception of the primary school as a key cultural arena for the construction and performance of identity and a concomitant expectation that children will live out dominant heteronormative 'girl' and 'boy' identities (Renold, 2000). It has become clear in recent research that children's attitudes and expectations are not just drawn from 'role model' adults in school and the home but also from peers, popular culture, social media and celebrities thus their understanding can differ greatly from the construction of gender that adults perceive them to have and uphold individually and in relation to others (Bragg et al., 2018; Brownhill et al., 2021; Warin and Price, 2020). Thus, whilst adults in settings such as those involved in this study may expect children to question performance of identity that does not conform to dominant gender norms, this may be incorrect. Interviewees in this study who denied any

experience of non-gender conformity amongst their pupils suggested that there was potential for bullying should such non-conformity arise. However, those working in schools where children had challenged expectations reported that the other children did not notice or did not comment. Rather it was adults at these schools who had reservations about the children's gender performance. This is important because it demonstrates the potential for gender-neutral uniform. Whilst the existence of a policy does not mean that anyone will take advantage of an opportunity to make code-breaking choices, the availability of the option prevents adults from perpetuating dominant gender stereotypes via enforcement of gender binarism. Research suggests that it is likely that those schools who chose to maintain gender binary policies do so on the grounds of the fear that fluidity or flexibility of garments undermines individual and collective gender identity (Reidy, 2021). It should be noted that this was the narrative evidenced in some of the interviews undertaken in the present study. However, there is no evidence of gender identity being so fragile (Rawlings and Hayes, 2018), and thus it can be said that such concerns are not grounded in safeguarding but rather in transphobia. Gender-neutral policies provide children with the opportunity to challenge heteronormativity hegemony if they wish and to find allies amongst their peers. This was demonstrated in the interview narratives in cases where children had challenged the status quo. A global review of evidence into youth mental health (Wilson and Cariola, 2020) and the gender research carried out by Bragg et al. (2018) with young people in the UK, explained the importance

young people place on having friends 'who understand you'. Thus, finding

allies made a tangible difference to feelings of isolation or vulnerability, and

reduced the incidence of all forms of harm amongst children who were

struggling. Therefore, enabling children to demonstrate their acceptance and

understanding of the spectrum of gender identities through uniform can be

seen as a positive step.

6.2.1 What explanations are given for the choice of current policy?

In this study the school representatives, without exception, said that their

school uniform was developed by staff and governors in collaboration with

pupils. Whilst the written policy documents showed that each and every

school had reviewed their policy within the last three years, the majority of the

interviewees said that their policy had remained the same for decades. The

uniform policy remaining the same was explained by interviewees as being

grounded on the fact that the policy worked, and it worked for everyone. It is

unsurprising that participants responded in this way. Reflective cultures are

difficult in schooling, with a tendency towards the positive (Kirkman and

Brownhill, 2020). No one wants to be seen to criticize the organisation they

work for or the people they work with, and if a policy was seen to be unfair yet

maintained and enforced by the participant in the course of their work, they

would be criticising themselves, their professionalism, and their commitment

to equality to say otherwise. Indeed, it was noticeable that interviewees

largely rearticulated aspects of the DfE (2013) guidance when responding to questions about the choice of uniform and its appropriateness. They universally reported that the children looked smart, had become equal and felt they belonged.

It was interesting to note that in some cases interviewees from schools with binary policies said that they felt their school uniform provided gender equity because girls could wear trousers. It is interesting because this type of policy is in fact, considered equal according to the *UNICEF* definition of gender equality. The definition states that girls and boys should enjoy the same opportunities, not that they should be the same or be treated exactly the same (*UNICEF*, 2011). So, this requirement for equality, rather than gender equity, allows school to focus on policy rather than outcomes. Schools can meet the requirements of equality legislation whilst perpetuating inequality through rules that affect the ability of children to take full part in school life due to the style, construction, and interpretation, of gendered clothing (Nathan, McCarthy and Hall et al., 2022; Reidy, 2021). Furthermore, the interviewees from these schools did not voice any concerns about their policy being an issue for gender variant children whose only option was to request a personal exemption from, or alteration to, uniform requirements. I argue that this is important because schools frequently use the notion of belonging as an explanation for their chosen uniform policy. Yet, a sense of belonging is

precisely the problem with gender binary uniforms for gender variant children. Roffey (2013) found that that when forced to dress in a manner that is not consistent with their felt gender, LGBTQ+ children feel that they do not belong. Thus, belonging is a nebulous term. Whilst all of these interviewees believe that uniform creates belonging, they have not interrogated what it is to belong. Therefore, a conclusion of this research is that rather than deliberately marginalising LGBTQ+ identities, schools simply fail to recognise who and what is and is not included and excluded by the policies they have.

6.2.2 How could the school adapt the policy to provide equal and appropriate provision for LGBTQ+ children?

The first and most obvious answer to the question of how could the school adapt the policy to provide equal and appropriate provision for LGBTQ+ children is to ensure their school uniform policy is gender-neutral. In this study it has been shown that the term gender-neutral policy can be interpreted in a number of ways so it is perhaps worth defining this recommendation as a school uniform policy with one list of items that any child can choose any item or combination of items from. Given that in my study some schools found that polo shirt colours were claimed according to gender even when this was not specified by the policy, it may also be advisable for schools to choose a single colour for polo shirts as they already do for sweatshirts, trousers, skirts and pinafores.

Comments made by interviewees also show that in addition to moving to a gender-neutral policy, schools will need to work to combat heteronormativity in society by informing their suppliers that they want school polo shirts and school sweatshirts, not 'boy' versions that are 'more robust' and 'girl' versions 'with a pretty scalloped collar.' Historically, uniform has followed the patterns of fashion and past fashions in line with the codification and consumption of clothing more generally (Stephenson, 2021). Thus, it is unsurprising that interviewees perceived themselves to have little power with regard to gendered styles of garment thrust upon parents by manufacturers and retailers. However, I argue that they do have the power to change the available options, particularly if the change is requested by schools on mass because school uniform is financially lucrative to suppliers. Therefore, another conclusion of this research is that schools should not specify a particular style of skirt or trouser but allow parents to choose the style that fits their child from all available options across multiple suppliers. This will ensure that they provide equal and appropriate provision for those who identify as LGBTQ+ and those who go on to do so in the future.

6.2.3 Are there any barriers to making these changes and how could these be overcome?

The interviews conducted in this study show that multiple barriers exist with regard to making school uniform policies inclusive of LGBTQ+ identities.

Whilst some of these barriers may be overcome by schools willing to engage in reflection, resistance in wider society may hamper such efforts.

By far the greatest barrier to change is the heteronormative worldview of those who create school uniform policies and those who enforce them on a daily basis. In this study I found that the endemic nature of heteronormativity in society meant that many school personnel were seemingly unaware that their words and actions could be exclusionary to LGBTQ+ children. However, heteronormative hegemony is neither a new concept nor one that is limited to the provision and policing of uniform. As Pallota-Chiarolli (2010) argues, the erasure of LGBTQ+ identity is evident in many aspects of school life, starting at the point of admission with forms that ask for the contact details of one mother and one father and the binary gender of the child, which must on inspection match the child's birth certificate. Such administrative issues position both LGBTQ+ people, and reconstructed families, as 'other'. Equally, heteronormative hegemony infiltrates curricula with topic work, observed celebrations, books and other artefacts silently reinscribing the norms of gender identity and gender roles (DePalma and Atkinson, 2009a; Neary, 2021). In this study, even in schools that had gender-neutral school uniform policies, there was often evidence that schools saw girls and boys as intrinsically different rather than just as children. That said, all of the schools in this study gave girls the option of trousers. Media narratives in the past few

years have showcased situations where schools requested that girls as young as three wore something under their uniform in order to be modest (Lindsay, 2017; Mallen, 2021), but there was no evidence of any school in the present study making such a request. However, there was evidence of heterosexist categorisation of girls that reflected the previous work of both Renold (2000) and Paetcher (2010) on the labelling of 'tomboys' and 'girly-girls' according to preferences in clothing and activities. In this study, whenever trans and non-binary identities were raised interviewees became either careful or defensive. This would seem to align with the results of a survey by the campaign charity *Diversity Role Models* (2021a) which found that 80% of primary school teachers felt unable to implement LGBTQ+ aspects of the new RSE curriculum due to their lack of knowledge. Thus, I argue that school staff and governors need adequate training in order to recognise the heteronormativity in their policies and practices. From the perspective of uniform this would allow them to see where their expectations privilege the gender binary and provide the space to consider LGBTQ+ issues. Potvin (2016) argued that particularly for cis-gender heterosexual staff, such an interrogation of how and why they think in the way that they do and consider other options has been shown to be necessary to overcome homophobia and transphobia.

The second barrier to change raised in this study is morality and religion. Interviewees provided contrasting views over the coexistence of religious

practice and LGBTQ+ recognition and inclusion. There have been well documented violent protests in the past against the recognition of LGBTQ+ plus identities in school on the grounds of both. The *No Outsiders action research project* aimed to develop strategies for including LGBTQ+ identities in school, but the project was halted by those who claimed the work was immoral and sexualised children (DePalma and Jennet, 2010). The schools involved in the present study appeared to fear such judgement and whilst they were comfortable discussing a gender-neutral policy, specific discussion of trans and non-binary identities provoked denial and distancing. However, it is not a conclusion of this study that religion is always a barrier to LGBTQ+ inclusion. Systematic evaluation by a number of researchers has noted that various faiths have guidance for school leaders on how to meet equality guidance and specifically include LGBTQ+ people in respect to curriculum and uniform (Mirvis, 2018). Thus, whilst some reject LGBTQ+ identities, this is not a universal position (Taylor and Cuthbert, 2019). In my research I found examples of both perspectives, a church school committed to including everyone as an exemplification of the teachings of their faith; and another, of the same denomination, who saw LGBTQ+ identities as wrong and against the teachings of the faith. All people have a worldview that legitimises their actions and views. Thus, the barrier is not religion per se but rather the question of how to help all people see that everyone is normal, all identities are acceptable and all people are equal, without exception. The study does

not draw any conclusions as to how this could be achieved other than requesting at least tolerance from those holding positions of power in school.

An additional barrier to LGBTQ+ inclusive school uniform practice identified by this study is 'Groupthink.' Given endemicity of heteronormativity in society and the power of religious and moral conservative framings of gender, it is important to consider how individuals and groups can impact the outcome of any decision-making process sensitive to these heuristics (Sunstein and Hastie, 2014). Heteronormativity was a key feature of most interview testimonies in this study. Furthermore, the interviews revealed that even when some members of the school community had the knowledge and desire to enact change in school policies and procedures, they found themselves blocked by other members of the school community. An understanding of groupthink and power developed over many decades (Hart, 1991; Janis, 1982) claims that where decision making processes involve multiple stakeholders, those with greater power or experience in negotiation, or those that hold the majority view do tend to have greater influence over the final decision. Additionally, due to the relative power of different individuals involved in the group, not all options or available evidence may be considered. The interviews undertaken here show very clearly that this was the case. Interviewees spoke of "other staff" (Rachel, Teacher), claimed "parents wouldn't like it" (Lisbeth, Headteacher), and that "governors would

have a problem with that." (Roscoe, Teacher). Thus, one ally promoting a post-heteronormative dialogue in school is not enough because other stakeholders can, and do, overrule ideas that do not fit their worldview. Reidy's (2021) appraisal of uniform from a public health perspective argued that school staff and governors cannot be expected to be experts in garment design and selection nor in policy development thus they may require more support in this work. This study concurs with that view and argues that in addition these groups are not necessarily LGBTQ+ allies nor hold enough knowledge to recognise or overcome the heteronormativity in policymaking. The situations in which there was evidence of gender equitable practice were those where schools had engaged in specific LGBTQ+ focused reflection alongside those with direct experience. Therefore, the final outcome of this research is that multiple barriers exist to inclusive policymaking for LGBTQ+ identities. It would be useful for schools to engage in LGBTQ+ focused CPD in order to develop a greater awareness of heteronormativity and its visible and invisible impacts on children and families. However, on the basis of the above discussion, I also believe that the study shows that on a basic level LGBTQ+ inclusivity would be greatly enhanced if the government drafts legislation to enforce gender-neutral policymaking in all schools. To sum up, a post-heteronormative society will take time but de-coding uniform to include all options for everyone is a step that can be taken now to move towards all schools being a place of allyship for LGBTQ+ children and families.

6.3 Summary

In this chapter I have linked the findings of the analysis presented in Chapter Five to the aims of this research. To this end I discussed how this endemic heteronormativity infiltrated policymaking and enactment leading to a split between espoused commitments to inclusivity and the reality for some children. I provided examples of situations where consensual heteronormativity marginalised LGBTQ+ identities, and elucidated the harm of current approaches that only allow some identities to exist. Furthermore, I linked these findings to previous research demonstrating that this reproduces heteronormativity amongst all pupils, laying the foundations for homophobic and transphobic bullying. At each stage I explored how this was addressed in some schools involved in this research and what other schools' thought would support them in challenging it in their schools going forward. Ultimately, I argue that legislation is needed to ensure that all children feel included and comfortable, and to ensure another generation of children are not inducted into gender essentialism with regards to clothing.

The next chapter draws this thesis to a close, summarising the contributions of the research and making recommendations for policy and practice.

Chapter 7: Conclusion

In this thesis I have explored the negotiation and interpretation of gender equity in school uniform policies through interviews with staff and governors at fifteen Nottinghamshire primary schools. I explored how and when their policies had been developed and how the school representatives perceived them to have been received by the children and families they serve.

The study aimed to address two research questions. The first question asked "To what extent are school uniform policies compliant with the DfE School Uniform Guidance?" The answer is that all of the policies are compliant. However, gender equality is not the same as gender equity. So, whilst this study shows that 55% of Nottinghamshire Primary Schools have a gender-neutral uniform, and one school (0.35%) with no uniform, thus providing gender equity. There are 45% that have separate lists for boys and girls. Yet, these schools are still compliant with the current DfE School Uniform Guidance because they allow girls the option of trousers thus providing gender equality (DfE, 2013; *UNICEF*, 2011). Nevertheless, these policies still disadvantage LGBTQ+ children, and to some extent girls, because they perpetuate heteronormativity (Mallen, 2021). They force children to perform gender according to heterosexist gender rules removing the space for exploration and reinforcing stereotypes that already exist in society regarding what it is to be feminine, masculine or neither (Gilchrist and Zhang, 2022;

Renold et al, 2017; Warin and Price, 2020). I found that, even in cases where the school had a gender-neutral uniform, representatives repeated heterosexist societal gender norms. Many expressed the view that only a certain type of girl would wear trousers, and one representative stated that anything other than a short haircut was 'radical' for a boy. Interviewees spoke of differences between clothing worn by girls and boys, remarking on the fitted nature of girls' clothes and the robust nature of boys' clothes and shoes. None of the interviewees considered it necessary to have a gender-neutral uniform so that any child could wear anything, or for the purpose of gender stereotypes being addressed.

It seemed that being trans was a particular concern for schools. Without exception the schools claimed they had never had a trans or non-binary child in school yet some interviewees did go on to describe situations where a child was questioning their gender. Echoing previous research (Ramussen, 2011; Warin and Price, 2020), it seemed that these adults felt that children were too young to know about gender and make such decisions. Nevertheless, some interviewees did go on to say that they would be accommodated if a request was made. However, that returns to making a child different and requiring their parents or carers to ask permission from other adults for their child to be granted the 'privilege' of wearing what feels comfortable. This is a situation that has been shown to lead to bullying and mental distress (Rivers and

Duncan, 2013; *Stonewall*, 2017). Thus, my study confirms that as Butler

(2004) suggested, only heteronormative girl and boy identities are allowed to

exist in school.

Whilst the prevailing government insists that schools are in the best position

to choose a uniform that is appropriate for the children in their care, my

research suggests that this is not the case. Rather, a lack of legal mandate for

gender-neutrality leads to the perpetuation of heteronormativity. School

personnel are unaware of, or do not wish to, offer anything other than the

uniforms they already have. I read each of the 279 published Nottinghamshire

primary school uniform policies and every single one insisted that the chosen

uniform made children feel they belong. Such assertions are inconsistent with

evidence from their own interview testimonies, as well as countering previous

academic research (Bragg et al, 2018; Reidy, 2021; Roffey, 2013). Further

such assumptions fail to see, or include, anyone who does not fit

heteronormative expectations. Therefore, this study shows that yes, school

uniform policies do abide by the guidance as it is currently presented.

However, this guidance is inadequate because the policies continue to

disadvantage not just LBGTQ+ children, but all pupils by perpetuating

heteronormativity in school and in society.

The second research question asked "Can school uniform policies support gender equity?" My study makes an important and original contribution to current discourses about school uniform policies in that it shows that the present lack of gender equity stems from heteronormativity amongst adults and that this has a disproportionately negative impact on LGBTQ+ children. Whilst it appears that there is a lack of knowledge and understanding of heteronormativity and the impact that this has on children, there is also a concomitant notion that schools do not need to change. I have shown that this is harmful because it perpetuates gender norms and stereotypes. It also enables bullying and exclusionary narratives to be enacted in school against anyone who does not fit the heteronormative stereotype (DePalma and Atkinson, 2010; Lee 2019).

Whilst social media, gender and sexuality research, and charity reports prove that children and young people recognise and accept many ways of being, they feel that adults do not support them (Atkinson, 2021; *Diversity Role Models*, 2021a; Renold, et al, 2017). My study exemplifies this. In this thesis I have discussed the ways in which this is interpreted in policy and practice and presented a way in which schools could address the issue. In so doing, becoming allies to LGBTQ+ children through the recognition and rejection of heteronormative privilege, I argue that all schools need one uniform list that anyone can choose anything from. It should be a list that does not specify that

anyone should have one type of hairstyle. And it should be a list that does not tell children that either you look exactly the same or you are abnormal.

Personal taste and prevailing culture have a tendency to infiltrate every part of life including that of the school. Yet what one person or group deems as appropriate, be that girls' having long hair, boys being messy, tattoos being a statement of class, appearance affecting behaviour (Reay, 2012; Reidy, 2021; Skeggs, 2007), or any other personal opinion, should not define a uniform policy. Queer theory tells us that everyone has some access to power and thus everyone has some ability to challenge the prevailing societal norms and stereotypes (Butler, 2004). However, children's power is frequently taken away, and never more so than in the policing of the way they present their bodies through uniform (Renold, et al., 2017; Nayak and Kehily, 2006). Yet, the discussion in this thesis shows that with appropriate awareness and support, schools can assess and challenge the heteronormativity in their own policies and practices and work as a team to create a pre-emptive school culture that protects LGBTQ+ children from abuse, ensuring that every child has the chance to be and to do everything they dream of.

In sum, through exploring these research questions I found that current guidance and legislation do not ensure gender equity in school, particularly for

LGBTQ+ children. I discovered that heteronormativity amongst policymakers meant school uniform policy remained binary in nearly half of all Nottinghamshire primary schools and that there was a distinct lack of knowledge and understanding about and towards LGBTQ+ identities. Through my analysis I demonstrated that gender binary policies and the heteronormative perceptions of school staff limit the choices, aspirations, and trajectories of all children because they perpetuate exclusionary gender norms and stereotypes. They also lead to bullying, particularly of LGBTQ+ children as other children enforce boundaries of self-presentation in line with what they perceive as normal (Atkinson, 2021; Warin and Price, 2020). Surely, no child should feel that they must hide or change who they are to be accepted and no child should feel unsafe at school, yet at the present time many do (*Diversity Role Models* 2021a; Heah 2021; *Stonewall*, 2017).

I have, and continue to argue, that knowledge and communication are key to recognising and addressing this issue. Whilst the new RSE curriculum (DfE, 2020b) is a step towards LGBTQ+ inclusivity, it will not change heteronormative thinking on its own. I have shown in this thesis that most schools do not deliberately perpetuate policies and practices that have detrimental impacts. I cited evidence that 8 in 10 teachers report not knowing enough to support LGBTQ+ pupils in school or teach about LGBTQ+ identities (*Diversity Role Models*, 2021a; Heah, 2021) and discussed how this could

stem from being brought up in a time when LGBTQ+ identities were not visible, and in some cases were illegal (Plummer, 2008; Ellis, 2007; Lee, 2019). It may also stem from religious beliefs, however respect and tolerance for others are fundamental values of most religions and thus gender equity and LGBTQ+ inclusive practice are not incompatible with religious practice (Carlile, 2019). Through the interviews in this study, I was able to demonstrate that a lack of knowledge and understanding of LGBTQ+ identities and histories leads to policies and practices that do not support LGBTQ+ pupils in school primarily because school staff do not recognise the heteronormativity in their thoughts and actions and are unaware of their impact. Therefore, training is required at school level.

As a result, I recommend that schools use CPD time to undertake in-person training on gender equity and LGBTQ+ inclusion. Such training is currently available from a number of organisations including *No Outsiders* (2021) and *Diversity Role Models* (2021b). I also recommend that all schools download and consider as a team, the concise and actionable *UCL Institute of Education and School of Sexuality Education School* Uniform Guidance for Schools (2021). These actions will facilitate a reassessment of all policies and practices, identify potential areas of concern and help to stop harmful narratives being perpetuated. Most importantly, they will show teachers how to be allies to LGBTQ+ children. Given that Wilson and Cariola's (2020)

international review of research evidence indicates that one ally in one setting is enough to stop all forms of harm currently experienced by LGBTQ+ children, including lifelong anxiety, depression, self-harm, and suicide, this is a perfect opportunity for schools to radically change the trajectory of children's lives.

This study was more limited in sample size than I had hoped and planned for, and consequently these findings cannot and do not claim to represent the views of every school or every person associated with schools throughout the county or country. However, I do believe that they speak to, and will resonate with, everyone involved in education. The issues explored, and strategies identified, will provide all stakeholders with valuable knowledge about how their policies and practices can be updated to effectively support each and every child in their care, as well as encouraging closer analysis and open reporting of issues involved in ensuring LGBTQ+ children feel safe and included in school. As it was not possible to include children's voices in this study, future research should concentrate on capturing their thoughts and experiences in order to get a full picture of where we are and what is possible.

That said, I recognise that addressing heteronormativity across the entirety of school life is almost as epic a task as addressing it in wider society. A post-

heteronormative society, and within that a post-heteronormative education system, will take a significant amount of time, training, and funding to achieve. That is why, on the basis of the arguments presented in this thesis, I believe that it is vital for the government to legally mandate gender-neutral school uniforms in every school. Each step towards equality is a necessary and urgent one. Recent changes to uniform guidance with respect to financial burden (DfE, 2021b) have proved that the government can insist on rapid change to school uniform policies through legislation. If they were to follow the example of the Welsh Government and further update the guidance to require gender-neutral uniform policies in all schools, all 8.9 million children at school in England today would not grow up thinking that only some gender identities are welcome. Every child would have equal options and the harmful and limiting gender stereotypes of the past would not be perpetuated.

In this research I have demonstrated that the current DfE School Uniform Guidance does not guarantee gender equity and that this has a disproportionately negative impact on LGBTQ+ children. As a result, I call upon the government to issue legislation to mandate gender-neutral uniform policies in all schools in England.

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Appendix One

Ethical Approval

Educational Research | Lancaster University

11 November 2020

Dear

Thank you for submitting your ethics application and additional information for "**Effective Allies: How Inclusive Are Primary School Uniform Policies?.**" The information you provided has been reviewed and I can confirm that approval has been granted for this project.

As principal investigator your responsibilities include:

- ensuring that (where applicable) all the necessary legal and regulatory requirements in order to conduct the research are met, and the necessary licenses and approvals have been obtained;
- reporting any ethics-related issues that occur during the course of the research or arising from the research (e.g. unforeseen ethical issues, complaints about the conduct of the research, adverse reactions such as extreme distress) to the Research Ethics Officer
- submitting details of proposed substantive amendments to the protocol to for approval.

Please do not hesitate to contact your supervisor if you require further information about this.

Kind regards,

Programme Administrator
Doctoral Programme in Education and Social Justice

Appendix Two

Participant Information Sheet

Title: Exploring the Interpretation and Negotiation of Gender Equity in the Uniform Policies of Nottinghamshire Primary Schools.

For further information about how Lancaster University processes personal data for research purposes and your data rights please visit our webpage: www.lancaster.ac.uk/research/data-protection

I am Emma Jordan, a PhD student at Lancaster University, and I would like to invite you to take part in a research study about gender equity in primary school uniform policies.

Please take time to read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part.

What is the study about?

This study looks at the types of uniform policy that are currently in use across primary schools in Nottinghamshire. It aims to uncover the reasoning behind a school's choice of school uniform policy, including its origin, development and implementation. It is hoped that by comparing and contrasting policies the study will be able to uncover the factors affecting school policy decision making on the issue of clothes and thus influence future official guidance and

information resources. This will enable them to address concerns and redress misconceptions so that all schools ensure gender equity in their policymaking.

Why have I been invited?

I have approached all primary schools in Nottinghamshire in order to get a representative sample of types of policy and policy reasoning across the county. I would be very grateful if you would agree to take part in this study.

What will I be asked to do if I take part?

If you decide to take part, this would involve a telephone interview with the researcher which will take around 40 minutes and be organised at your convenience. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher. The individual taking part in the interview will not be identified, a pseudonym will be allocated at the point of transcription.

What are the possible benefits from taking part?

Taking part in this study will provide your school with an opportunity to look at and discuss your school uniform policy and the ways in which it affects individuals and groups of children in your care. The school may also benefit from a greater knowledge of what heteronormativity is and does and the role school policies play in gender equity. Participation demonstrates the schools' commitment to continuous development and can be used as evidence in this regard.

Do I have to take part?

No. It is completely up to you to decide whether or not you take part. Your participation is voluntary. If you decide not to take part in this study, this will not affect your position in school or your relations with your employer.

What if I change my mind?

If you change your mind, you are free to withdraw at any time during your participation in this study. If you wish to withdraw, please let me know, and I will extract any ideas or information (=data) you contributed to the study and destroy them. However, it is difficult to take out data from one specific participant when this has already been pooled with other data in an analysis. Therefore, you can only withdraw up to two weeks after taking part in the study.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

The only disadvantage to taking part is that it will take up around 40 minutes of your time.

Will my data be identifiable?

After the interview, only I, the researcher conducting this study will have access to the information you share with me. I will keep all personal information about you (your school's name, telephone number and other information that can identify you) confidential, that is I will not share it with

others. I will remove any personal information from the written record of your contribution. All reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

How will we use the information you have shared with us and what will happen to the results of the research study?

I will use the information you have shared with me for research and media purposes. This will include my PhD thesis and other publications, for example journal articles, publications for policy-makers and schools, magazine and website articles. I may also present the results of my study at academic conferences or in media interviews.

When writing up the findings from this study, I would like to reproduce some of the views and ideas you shared with me. I will only use anonymised quotes, so that although I will use your exact words, all reasonable steps will be taken to protect your anonymity in my publications.

How will my data be stored?

Your data will be stored in encrypted files (that no-one other than me, the researcher will be able to access) on password-protected computers. I will store hard copies of any data securely in a locked safe in my office. I will keep data that can identify you separate from non-personal information (for example your views on a specific topic). In accordance with the

University guidelines, I will keep the data securely for a minimum of ten years.

What if I have a question or concern?

If you have any queries or if you are unhappy with anything that happens concerning your participation in the study, please contact myself, Emma Jordan at [email address redacted] or my supervisor, Professor Carolyn Jackson at [email address redacted] on [telephone number redacted] or by post to [address redacted].

If you have any concerns or complaints that you wish to discuss with a person who is not directly involved in the research, you can also contact:

Professor Jo Warin, Director of Studies in Education and Social Justice, [email address redacted] on [telephone number redacted] or by post to [address redacted]

This study has been reviewed and approved by the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences and Lancaster Management School's Research Ethics Committee.

Thank you for considering participating in this project.

Appendix Three

Consent Form

Project Title: Exploring the Interpretation and Negotiation of Gender Equity in the Uniform Policies of Nottinghamshire Primary Schools.

Name of Researcher: Emma Jordan

Email: [email address redacted]

Please tick each box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet for the above study. I have had the opportunity to consider the information, ask questions and have had these answered satisfactorily ☐

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time during my participation in this study and within two weeks following the study, without giving any reason. ☐ If I withdraw within two weeks of taking part in the study my data will be removed.

I understand that any information given by me may be used in future reports, academic and media articles, publications and/or ☐

presentations by the researcher, but my personal information will not be included and all reasonable steps will be taken to protect the anonymity of the participants involved in this project.

I understand that my name/my organisation's name will not appear in any reports, articles or presentation. ☐

I understand that interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed and that data will be protected on encrypted devices ☐ and kept secure.

I understand that data will be kept according to the University guidelines for a minimum of 10 years after the end of the study. ☐

I agree to take part in the above study. ☐

_____   _____   _____

Name of Participant   Date   Signature

I confirm that the participant was given an opportunity to ask questions about the study, and all the questions asked by the participant have been answered correctly and to the best of my ability. I confirm that the individual has not been coerced into giving consent, and the consent has been given freely and voluntarily.

Signature of Researcher [redacted]   Date *January 2021*

One copy of this form will be given to the participant and the original kept in

the files of the researcher at Lancaster University.

Appendix Four

Interview Schedule

Title: Exploring the Interpretation and Negotiation of Gender Equity in the Uniform Policies of Nottinghamshire Primary Schools.

Pseudonym: See key for school contact details.

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Interviewer: Hi, I'm Emma, I'm going to be interviewing you today. Thank for agreeing to participate in this study. Could you please confirm for the benefit of the tape that you have had the opportunity to read and review the Participant Information Sheet and that you have signed the Consent Form.

Interviewee: Agree/Disagree [If participant does not confirm having seen the Participant Information Sheet or has not signed the Consent Form the interview must be terminated].

Q1. Tell me about your school.

Q2. What is your role?

Q3. Describe your current school uniform?

Q4. Does your school uniform policy specify different options for different age groups or genders? Tell me more about that.

Q5. Why was this uniform chosen? Was that universally the position, did governors/staff/children all take the same view?

Q6. How does your uniform policy promote the ethos of your school?

Q7. When was the last time your uniform policy was changed? What impact did that have?

Q8. Who was consulted about the uniform and who made the final decision?

Q9. How do you inform the parents about the school's expectations for uniform?

Q10. To what extent do the pupils comply with the uniform policy or find ways to challenge, resist or subvert it? Please will you expand on that.

Q11. Has anyone ever formally requested a uniform variation? How did that get resolved?

Q12. Has the school considered making the uniform gender neutral (one uniform list that any pupil may choose any item from)? What do you think are the reasons for that?

Q13. If there are barriers to a gender-neutral uniform, what are they?

Q14. Do any of your current pupils identify as trans or non-binary? What issues has that raised in relation to uniform?

Q15. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Interviewer: Thank you for participating in this study and sharing your time and opinions with me today.