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AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PRIVATE SCHOOL ADMISSION POLICIES
FOR STUDENTS OF SAME-SEX PARENTS,
HOMOSEXUAL, AND TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

By

KAREN K. CAROE

A doctoral dissertation submitted to the
College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree Doctor of Education
in Organizational Leadership

Southeastern University
September 2019

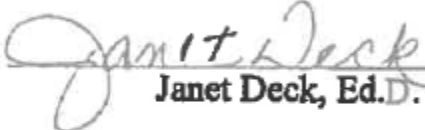
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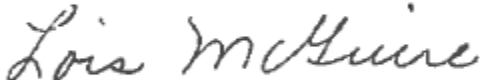
by


KAREN K. CAROE

Dissertation Approved:


Patty LeBlanc, Ph.D. Dissertation Chair


Janet Deck, Ed.D. Committee Member


Lois McGuire, Ed.D. Committee Member


Jim Anderson, Ph.D. Dean, College of Education

DEDICATION

Glory be to the Father,
and to the Son,
and to the Holy Spirit.
As it was in the beginning,
is now,
and ever shall be,
world without end.
Amen.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

“Thank you” does not adequately describe my gratitude to Dr. Patty LeBlanc, my dissertation chair, for her never-failing belief in the value of this study. My committee members, Dr. Janet Deck and Dr. Lois McGuire, understood my desire for excellence and offered fresh perspectives and insights. Dr. Kenneth S. Coley of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary generously provided me with his research from 2012 and I am grateful for his guidance.

I could not have completed a doctoral program if it weren’t for my hard-working faculty at Desert Springs Christian Academy. Kathleen Gleason, Jennifer Krol, and Sarah Glidewell took on extra projects and day-to-day problems, so I had time to write. There is not enough wine in the world to adequately express my gratitude to them.

I am humbled by constant prayers and encouragement from my best friend and sister, Ruth Ann Hurab; my prayer partner, Judy Britton; and my dear friend from Cohort E, Gail Cushing. They sympathized with every complaint and applauded every successful step when I could not see the proverbial light at the end of the tunnel.

My greatest debt of gratitude goes to my family. My children—Jessica, Amanda and her husband Joshua, Austin and his wife Diana, Nathaniel, Stephen, Kimberly, Lydia, and Daniel—are my constant source of motivation to become a better human. Of course, I must mention my grandsons, Arthur and George, because that’s what a grandmother does, and they are my greatest joy. Most importantly, I thank my long-suffering husband, Alan. Even after 35 years, he tells me every day that he loves me and is proud of me. I am truly blessed.

ABSTRACT

This mixed-methods, non-experimental, exploratory study investigated the private school admission policies related to the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. The US Supreme Court decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) has had far-reaching consequences for Christian businesses, organizations and ministries. As the rapidly changing socio-political environment embraces LGBTQ concerns, private religious schools need to re-evaluate their admission policies and prepare to address new types of admission decisions. The theory base in this study was the evolutionary theory of social change. In this present study, the results of a nation-wide, anonymous on-line survey ($n = 80$) of both secular and religious private schools as well as semi-structured interviews of religious school administrators ($n = 5$) revealed that almost 73% of Christian schools do not have a policy in place to guide admission decisions regarding children from homosexual families or children with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria. The results from this current study may help private, faith-based school administrators develop written admission policies that promote balance between litigation concerns and the desire to serve and to show compassion in admission decisions.

Key Words: Students with same-sex parents; homosexual students; transgender students; admission policy; Christian schools; private schools; LGBTQ in schools

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I. INTRODUCTION

In the summer of 2017, a young mother applied to enroll her second-grade daughter at a private Christian school in southern New Mexico. The registrar called to schedule a family interview, and at the end of the conversation the mother casually noted that she was a same-sex parent and asked whether that fact would pose a problem for her child's admission. The school was caught unprepared to address questions regarding the admission of students with same-sex parents. The school did not have a policy to address this situation nor any of the questions related to admission of homosexual or transgender students. This study is designed to explore the policies of private schools with regard to admission of children from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students.

Background of the Study

Prior to 2015, when same-sex marriage became legal in all fifty states, the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) was asked for advice when an ACSI member school's administrator became aware that the parents of a current student were in a homosexual marriage (Coley, 2012). The ACSI leadership found itself grappling with ways to advise member schools regarding admission applications from same-sex couples. At its 2012 Leadership Academy, ACSI conducted a survey of attendees ($n = 66$) to ascertain whether member schools had received applications from same-sex families and whether the schools had an official policy-level response (Coley & Cathey, 2012). The researchers who analyzed the survey responses

concluded that “leaders [are] taking positions at polar opposites of the continuum on the issue and holding these positions on the basis of their understanding of biblical principles” (Coley, 2012, p.33).

As gay marriage, sexual orientation, and gender identity become more prevalent in the American culture wars, private religious, and possibly private secular schools, need to re-evaluate their admission policies to address new types of admission decisions. Even people who share the same religious views often have differing opinions about homosexuality. Private schools need policy-based reasons for both accepting and denying admission to students.

Statement of the Problem

On June 26, 2015, the Supreme Court of the United States (SCOTUS), in a 5-4 decision, ruled in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) that same-sex marriage is a fundamental right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution. What seemed to be a simple question of who could marry whom quickly opened the door to legal challenges against religious institutions and businesses that chose to stand upon the religious principles and protections explicitly guaranteed in the Bill of Rights. Private schools, particularly religious schools, have not been exempt from legal challenges to their religious beliefs.

The United States Census Bureau’s (2014) *Characteristics of same-sex couple households:2005-present* reported that 783,100 homosexual couples were living together in the United States. With the ruling of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) making same-sex marriage legal in all fifty states, the number of same-sex households increased by more than 150,000 couples by 2017 (U.S. Census Bureau, 2017). Based on these trends, the number of children living with same-sex parents is likely to increase as gay and lesbian couples legally acknowledge their relationship status and raise biological or adopted children together.

In 2015, Lenhart, Smith, and Anderson (2015) reported that two percent of teenagers self-identified as gay or lesbian, three percent identified as transgender, and three percent were unsure of their sexual identity. The number of teenagers who openly identify themselves as gay, lesbian, or transgender is also expected to increase in both public and private schools.

Less than a year after *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), President Obama, via executive order, issued a new set of Title IX directives designed to accommodate transgender students in public schools. The directives, disseminated by the United States Department of Justice and the United States Department of Education in a “Dear Colleague” letter (Lhamon and Gupta, 2016, to Colleague) raised several concerns among stakeholders in private schools. Private school administrators whose schools participated in school choice programs, received any type of federal funding, or maintained accreditation through state education departments feared they could lose funding by appearing to discriminate against students on grounds of sexual orientation (Swanson, 2015). Lawyers speculated that the federal tax-exempt status of religious schools could also be challenged if homosexual or transgender students were turned away or if appropriate accommodations were not made (Buckles, 2017).

A number of cities and states passed a plethora of new sexual orientation and gender identity laws (SOGI’s) and policies that directly clash with existing laws guaranteeing the free exercise of religious beliefs (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). Religious schools are under increasing societal pressure to acquiesce to the rapidly changing cultural standards of human sexuality (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Christian schools, desiring to be consistent with traditional biblical standards of morality and sexuality, increasingly find themselves in conflict with the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and the increased civil rights’ protections and accommodations for gay and transgender students (Christian Legal Society, 2015).

The *Private School Universe* (PSS) survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (Broughman, Kincel, and Peterson, 2019) revealed that during the 2015-2016 academic year, approximately 34,000 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States served almost five million students. Seventy percent of those private schools self-identified as a religious school ($n = 23,272$). Private school administrators need to carefully examine the ways that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) issues play a role in school admissions.

Conceptual Framework

This research study is rooted in the evolutionary theory of organizational change drawn from the relatively broad theoretical foundation of social change. Social change is defined by sociologists as “changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions” (Dunfey, 2017). All schools, public or private and regardless of the grades they serve, are social institutions. More than a century ago, French sociologist Èmile Durkheim identified schools as social institutions and discussed the social function of education for the whole of society (Crossman, 2019). While public schools tend to be “microcosms of larger society” (McMahon, 2018, p. 267), all schools are complex systems that serve as the primary place for socialization of children and youth (McMahon, 2018, p. 267). This exploratory study was designed to look at the ways that social changes regarding human sexuality and identity have influenced private school admissions.

Social change evolves over time, trickling into communities and ultimately into schools, whether private or otherwise (Lierman, n.d.). Parents often choose private and/or religious education as a means of protecting their children from the influence of social change, but all schools will eventually confront the key issues facing the larger society. The cycle of social

change inevitably leads to organizational changes, both at the governmental and school levels. The current research study examined private schools' admission policies in an effort to understand and interpret the consequences of rapid social change upon those organization in the area of human sexuality.

In higher education, the evolutionary theory of change has been applied by several researchers (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Gage, 2017; Kezar, 2001). Although the current researcher found no published research studies that applied evolutionary change theory to K-12 schools, the theory can provide insights into ways that change occurs in private K-12 schools. Private schools, as with colleges and universities, are tuition-dependent organizations and are, therefore, vulnerable to social and cultural change.

Organizational change is typically prompted by either internal or external factors (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Gage, 2017; Kezar, 2001). In this study, external factors include both socio-political and legal changes regarding marriage and human sexuality, and internal factors included the views of the various groups of private school stakeholders toward marriage and human sexuality. Kezar's (2001) work with evolutionary theory and higher education evaluated the interplay between external and internal forces to discover ways they influence educational institutions to make change. Responsiveness to change brought on by external factors can be characterized in multiple ways. Responses may be adaptive or generative, proactive or reactive, managed or planned, and active or static (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Gage, 2017; Kezar, 2001). The outcome of evolutionary change often results in new processes, missions, and structures that create cultural shifts in the organization. The evolutionary theory of change is covered in greater depth in chapter two.

This exploratory study of private school admission policies examined the ways changes in society have influenced admission policies with respect to same-sex marriage, homosexuality among school-aged children, and transgenderism. The foundational research for this study was conducted in 2012 by Kenneth Coley for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) in response to a member school's revelation that the school administrators had unknowingly admitted a child parented by two gay men (Coley, 2012). The member school experienced backlash from parents when the information became known, and the school's administration was struggling with the best way to manage the situation. The Coley (2012) study used a sample of convenience ($n = 66$) of member school leaders to ascertain their views and policies regarding the admission of children from same-sex couples.

A careful review of the literature, by the researcher, revealed a vacuum in scholarly research on private and religious school admission policies of children from same-sex homes and of homosexual or transgender students. Articles in academic journals such as the *Harvard Journal for Law and Public Policy* (Buckles, 2017) have speculated on the collateral effects of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) and society's rapidly changing views of morality, marriage and sexual identity. In addition, industry-specific newsletters are filled with advice on ways to approach concerns related to same-sex families and gay or transgender students. For example, the Christian Legal Society (2015) prepared a 23-page guidebook for private Christian schools to aid in their understanding and handling of student admission in light of sexual orientation and gender identity. Popular literature, though more abundant, is primarily anecdotal and presents stories with editorial praise or condemnation for decisions made by school administrators. The question of admission policies and practices, especially among private Christian schools, appears to be a ripe area for further research.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine whether private religious and secular schools have codified policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. A second purpose was to identify the principles that guide admission policy decisions regarding the target group of students, and the consequences of those decisions on private schools and their stakeholders.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?
2. Have private schools re-examined or changed their admission policies to address admission of students with same-sex parents and students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?
3. What factors influence the admission policies of private schools with regard to admission of students who have same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?
4. How do admission policies related to students from same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students shape a private school's culture and, subsequently, the views of stakeholders?

Definition of Key Terms

For clarity, the following definitions will be used throughout the dissertation.

Same-sex family. A same-sex family is one in which two people of the same gender live together as a married couple and who parent children.

Homosexual. A person sexually attracted to persons of the same sex. Homosexuals include males (gays) and females (lesbians) (Shiel, 2018)

Transgender. This umbrella term describes people whose gender identity or expression is not consistent with their biological identification at birth (Bradford, 2018).

Overview of Methodology

The research design of this study was a mixed-methods, non-experimental, exploratory investigation of private school admission policies specifically addressing students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. Both quantitative and qualitative data were collected and analyzed to address the four research questions.

Once the researcher obtained approval from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of the sponsoring university, an 18-question, online survey invitation was emailed to 300 private school administrators and leaders around the United States. An invitation was posted in the member community forum of Kappa Delta Pi online, on the community announcement page of LinkedIn, and Southeastern University's Doctor of Education Facebook page. The survey (Appendix A) collected both quantitative and qualitative data from 80 respondents.

The online survey employed a mixture of question types and response types. Questions requiring a 'yes' or 'no' response were used to identify trends in the admission policy decisions of private schools. Likert-scale items were used to measure the factors that schools take into consideration when making an admission decision as well as the perceived consequences of the admission policy decisions on the school and its stakeholders. All survey questions addressed the admission policies for students with same-sex parents, self-identified homosexual students, and self-identified transgender students.

The researcher piloted the draft survey using a sample of convenience ($n = 5$) in order to establish the content validity of the survey as a whole, the validity of survey items, item clarity, and to elicit suggestions regarding possible revisions of items and response types. Five private school administrators participated in the pilot and offered their suggestions, which were ultimately incorporated into the final survey depicted in Appendix A. A panel of experts composed of the dissertation committee further validated the survey items before dissemination.

The researcher also conducted semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) with a small, purposive sample ($n = 5$) of private school administrators who volunteered to be interviewed in order to gain more in-depth information related to the research questions. All interview participants signed an Adult Consent to be Interviewed (Appendix C) prior to the interview session. Interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed by the researcher, then verified by the interviewees.

The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) were designed by the researcher to probe more deeply into the factors that private school administrators consider in their decisions to approve or deny admission to students of same-sex parents or to students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender. In addition, the researcher probed further into the influence of admission policies on the school culture and the school's stakeholders. The interview questions were reviewed by the dissertation chair and validated by the dissertation committee.

Data Analysis

The results of the survey's demographic items (items 1-5) were compiled by the researcher, and descriptive statistics were used to describe the frequencies and percentages of types of schools represented in the sample of respondents.

Frequencies and percentages were computed and reported for responses to Yes-No questions (items 8, 10, 12, 17, and 18) while means and standard deviations were computed to report responses to the Likert-scale items (items 13 and 16). Specific policy statements (items 7, 9, 11, and 14) were compiled and reported qualitatively as emergent themes.

Responses to the semi-structured interviews (Appendix B) were analyzed to address research question four. Each interview participant was audio-recorded, and the interviews were transcribed. The researcher asked each interview participant to validate his or her transcript to ensure that it adequately described each individuals' responses. All responses were coded and reported as individual interview results and as emergent group themes.

Significance of the Study

The results of this exploratory study contribute to the conversation about the different ways that private schools address the legal and societal issues of same-sex marriage, sexual identity, and gender orientation as they relate to school admission. The results of the research demonstrated the extent to which this sample of private schools is pro-actively and reactively involved in developing policies specifically designed to address admission decisions related to same-sex families and homosexual or transgender children. Finally, the research suggested trends in admission practices for schools that do not have policies in place or that grapple with the establishment of a policy.

Limitations and Assumptions

The researcher has identified several limitations inherent to this study's research design and are described below.

1. The research survey was limited to self-reported data from a non-random sample of volunteer respondents.

2. The sample size was limited to school administrators who responded to a request to complete the on-line survey.
3. Volunteer interview participants were limited to their personal perceptions regarding the opinions of stakeholders and the underlying philosophies of his or her school's admission policy.
4. This research study did not make a denominational distinction between religious schools beyond the labels of Catholic and Christian.
5. The researcher assumed that schools that identified as secular did not ascribe to nor teach specific religious doctrines.
6. This research study did not address legal issues surrounding the acceptance or rejection of students from same-sex couples, homosexual, or transgender students except when reporting comments made by interview participants.
7. The research was not intended to determine best practices in private school admission, but rather to demonstrate trends based upon specific philosophical principles.

Organization of the Study

This chapter presents the background and introductory information relevant to the study. Chapter two presents the theoretical underpinnings of the research along with relevant scholarly, popular, and industry-specific literature related to private school admission and human sexuality issues. The details of the study's methodology are explained in chapter three. In chapter four, the quantitative and qualitative results of the online survey and semi-structured interviews are presented. Chapter five discusses the results, offers suggestions to private schools based upon trends, and poses suggestions for future research.

II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine whether private religious and secular schools have codified policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. A second purpose is to identify the principles that guide admission policy decisions and the influence of those decisions on private schools and their stakeholders.

The administrators and admissions counselors of private religious schools, as well as private secular schools, increasingly encounter admission questions regarding children with same-sex parents and students who self-report as gay, lesbian, or transgender. Many articles in academic journals such as the *Harvard Journal for Law and Public Policy* (Buckles, 2017) have written on the potential effects of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), along with society's expanding definitions marriage and sexual identity, on religious and educational institutions. Popular literature, though more abundant, is primarily composed of media outlets reporting cases of private school administrators who have made policy statements about or denied admission to students from same-sex families and students who are homosexual or transgender. Additionally, professional literature, such as trade-specific newsletters, provide suggestions to private schools on ways to approach concerns related to same-sex families and gay or transgender students. For example, the Christian Legal Society (2015) prepared a 23-page guidebook for private Christian

schools to aid their understanding of the social, political, economic, and legal matters surrounding the admission of students with respect to sexual orientation and gender identity.

Despite the changing cultural landscape, most private schools seemingly have not kept pace with these changes by updating admission policies to adequately reflect their philosophical, precepts. After laying the theoretical groundwork, this review will examine academic, popular, and professional literature related to private school admission policies.

Evolutionary Change Theory

The conceptual framework for this study was gleaned from the work of Professor Adrianna Kezar (2001) at the University of Southern California. Her evolutionary change model for organizations was exclusively focused on change, needed change, and change resistance in institutions of higher learning. While a comprehensive search of academic literature, by the researcher, did not produce any studies that applied evolutionary change theory to private K-12 schools, the theory serves as an appropriate lens for evaluating change, needed change, and resistance to change in private schools. Like many colleges and universities and unlike public schools, private schools are tuition-dependent and highly susceptible to competition, demographic shifts, and socio-political movements (Gage, 2017).

Evolutionary change theory is not new and had its origins in Darwinian theory. The first appearance of Darwin's evolutionary theory in 1859 was presented as a theory in the life sciences to describe a process by which physical organisms change over time. The change process occurred in the organism's inherited physical or behavioral traits to help the organism survive by allowing it to adapt to its environment (Than, 2018). The original biological models posed by Darwin have evolved into sophisticated applications to human societies, groups, and individuals. Social scientists have adapted the evolutionary change theory and it is now

discussed alongside various social change theories. Consequently, any discussion of change theory in education is best served by a brief discussion of social change.

Sociologists define social change as “changes in human interactions and relationships that transform cultural and social institutions” (Dunfey, 2017). Cultural, religious, economic, scientific, and/or technological forces are the drivers of social change (Little, 2000). Social change evolves over time, trickling into communities and ultimately into schools, whether private or otherwise (Lierman, n.d.). While public schools tend to be “microcosms of larger society,” all schools are complex systems that serve as the primary institution for socialization of children and youth (McMahon, 2018, p. 267). Parents often choose private and/or religious education as a means of protecting their children from the effects of social change, but all schools will eventually confront the key issues facing the larger society.

In the current study, the term “evolutionary theory” refers to the change model adopted by social scientists and applied to the study of organizational change. Kezar’s (2001) review of typologies of organizational change discussed ways that the evolutionary model of organizational change is applied, the underlying assumptions, and the tenets that are typically associated with the model. The primary assumptions of the evolutionary model of change are that change is dependent upon circumstance, situational variables, and the environment within which an organization operates (Baker & Baldwin, 2014). The organizational environment can refer to the external environment of culture, society, or community or to the internal environment of the industry in which an organization operates. For example, a single university operates within the environment of higher education. A private Christian school may operate in the environment of a church, denomination, or an organization with member schools such as the Association of Christian Schools International.

Baker and Baldwin (2014) explained that in the evolutionary model of change, organizations tend to manage rather than plan for change, thus creating a survival-type response to the force that acts upon it. Key tenets of evolutionary models of change include a) interaction between the organization and its environment; b) the relationship between the environment and internal change, which is considered highly dependent on the external environment; c) homeostasis and/or self-regulation, which provide insights on an institution's ability to maintain a steady state; and d) evolution (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Kezar, 2001). The evolutionary model of change is primarily interested in the influence of external factors on organizational change. External factors may be economic, technological, social, political, or a combination of all (Gleeson, 2019).

The evolutionary model of organizational change has been criticized by some change theorists for its limited regard for internal factors as an indication of or influence on change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014). Internal forces include such factors as mission, leadership, stakeholders, communication, organizational structure, organizational history, and learning (Gleeson, 2019). The current study is focused on both the external socio-political issues of society and the internal factors that influence the admission policies of private schools, making the evolutionary model an appropriate lens through which to consider institutional change.

Additional concepts advanced by Kezar (2001) included the degree of change, the scale of change, and the focus of change (Kezar, 2001). According to Kezar (2001), the degree of any change in an organization can be labeled as first-order or second-order. Kezar refers to first-order changes as minor adjustments or improvements that work within the existing structure and worldview of the organization. Change to a policy or process that leads to an improved or more accurate way of working, is an example of a first-order change (Smith, 2018). According to

Kezar (2001), a second-order change is transformational—potentially leading to a change in an organization’s mission, vision, or values. The scale of change, described by Kezar (2001), is related to the depth and breadth of the change. The scale could be across an entire industry or specific to one entity, group, or division within a single organization (Gage, 2017).

Responsiveness to change brought on by external factors can be characterized in multiple ways. Responses may be adaptive or generative, proactive or reactive, and active or static (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Gage, 2017; Kezar, 2001). Adaptive responses are typically one-time responses to an external force or a combination of forces, while generative responses are on-going and inherently part of the organization’s core (Gage, 2017). A proactive response is made prior to and in anticipation of a potential crisis, allowing for a planned response to take place over time. Reactive responses generally come after a crisis has already occurred and an organization finds itself in the position of scrambling to manage a response more quickly than it would like. Lastly, a response is active when organizational members are involved in the change and support the organization through the change. Limited involvement between institutional leaders and their stakeholders typically leads to a more static response (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

The outcomes of evolutionary change can be new processes, missions, systems, and structures that result in a cultural shift in an organization. Coutts (2016) described organizational culture as a construct consisting of a group of people with shared experiences, values, beliefs, norms, rules, and traditions; therefore, any study of change in an educational institution must, at the very least, include a study of the institution’s culture. Culture and change are inextricably intertwined (Coutts, 2016).

Gage (2017) applied Kezar’s (2001) evolutionary change model to a single case study of a private, tuition-dependent, four-year college as it went through a change in its admission policy

in response to external economic and social factors that plague many tuition-dependent schools. External environmental factors that influenced the target school's decision to change its admission policies included shifting demographics, competition for students, decreased state funding, escalating tuition with flat tuition revenue, retention and graduation rates, academic readiness, and student loan debt (Gage, 2017). Though private K-12 schools may not face all these challenges, failure to prepare for them may have far-reaching consequences.

Evolutionary change theory is a suitable framework for an exploratory study of admission policies in private K-12 schools. Socio-political and legal changes to the definition of marriage and the educational-institutional accommodations necessary for gay and transgender youth are important external factors that influence schools to adapt and change.

Academic Literature

After a careful review of the literature, this researcher found that relevant, scholarly research on private secular and religious school admission policies of children from same-sex homes and of homosexual or transgender students is essentially non-existent. The most cogent evidence to date was a study conducted by Coley and Cathey (2012) for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and reported in several publications under the title, "Should Your Christian School Enroll the Child of a Same-Sex Couple?" (Coley, 2012). To answer the question, Coley (2012) surveyed a non-random sample of convenience ($n = 66$) of ACSI member schools' administrators.

The introductory narrative to Coley's (2012) research report suggests that his study may have been a reactionary response to a situation that occurred in an Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) accredited member school. Reportedly, the administrator of a private Christian school had unknowingly admitted the second-grade child of a gay couple.

Knowledge of the parents' homosexual relationship came to light at a birthday party to which the young child was invited and at which both of her fathers were in attendance.

The survey (Appendix D) designed by Coley and Cathey (2012) consisted of five statements yielding quantitative data: two binary response (yes/no) statements, two multiple choice statements, and one Likert-scaled statement. The survey concluded with three short-answer statements designed to yield qualitative responses.

The results of the survey (Appendix D) indicated that 27% of ACSI school administrators who responded to the survey ($n = 66$) had been approached by same-sex couples who were seeking enrollment for their child(ren) and that initial contact with this type of admission situation occurred as early as 2004 (Coley, 2012). By the time ACSI launched its research on the topic of same-sex families and Christian school admissions in 2012, the number of contacts had more than tripled (Coley, 2012). When Coley (2012) triangulated the qualitative responses with the quantitative survey data, he found that Christian school leaders were “taking positions at polar opposites of the continuum on the issue and holding these positions on the basis of their understanding of biblical principles” (p. 33).

Coley (2012) recommended that private Christian school leaders of ACSI member schools review their policies, review their practices, and dialogue with their boards of directors before their next round of admission applications and interviews. A comprehensive search of academic literature by the researcher does not reveal a follow-up study by ACSI or any other private school organization.

The modern evangelical Christian school movement in America began in approximately 1950 and experienced exponential growth for over 50 years before it came to a standstill in 2006 when evangelical schools closed in large numbers (Nichols, 2016). In his dissertation, “*Schools*

at Risk: An Analysis of Factors Endangering the Christian School Movement in America,”

Nichols (2016) identified possible reasons for enrollment declines and subsequent closings in the evangelical Christian school arena.

Utilizing a qualitative, grounded theory approach, Nichols (2016) used a specific set of criteria to build a purposive sample of 129 participants. The participants were all associated with ACSI at various levels including ACSI leadership, member school leadership teams, and life-long Christian school educators. Participants received an electronic invitation to participate in an online survey that probed the factors that led to the downturn of the Christian school movement, the factors that continued to endanger Christian schools, and whether the kinds of responses of Christian school leaders endanger or support the Christian school movement (Nichols, 2016).

In addition to the online survey, Nichols (2016) also utilized interviews and document review to help answer his three research questions:

1. What are the nature and causes of the decline in the number of evangelical Christian schools in America and the third Christian school movement since 2006?
2. What factors continue to endanger the movement?
3. What are associational and school leaders in the movement doing—or recommending be done regarding the factors that continue to endanger it, in order to reverse the movement’s downward trend

In his findings, Nichols (2016) did not specifically identify same-sex marriage, youth homosexuality, or transgenderism as a contributing factor to the downturn, but those issues fell well within the confines of what he referred to as “Cultural Shifts—Cultural Changes” (Nichols, 2016, p. 46). His research revealed cultural shifts as the third highest factor related to the closing of Christian schools (Nichols, 2016). The educators who participated in his study reported that

the first two factors were “financial stresses” and “the Great Recession” respectively (Nichols, 2016).

In his discussion of cultural shifts and changes, Nichols (2016) quoted one respondent, a Christian education leader, as saying:

Christian communities have been slow to recognize the shift in American society and so are behind in addressing the changing culture. While some Christian communities have also been afraid to take a stand on core beliefs for fear of being perceived as exclusive or not politically correct, others have become very rigid, outspoken and almost militant in their stand on cultural issues facing the world today (p.112).

Nichols (2016) concluded that biblically conservative evangelicals in the United States viewed these cultural shifts as “potentially catastrophic developments for Christianity and the church” (Nichols, 2016, p. 47). He went on to posit that a growing backlash to traditional Christian values and beliefs have left American evangelicals overwhelmed as they address questions of politics, sexuality, race, gender, and religious freedom (Nichols, 2016).

Evangelical Christian schools are not the only schools struggling with ways to handle the admission of students from same-sex families or students who self-identify as lesbian, gay or transgender. Despite a 2018 publication by the Cardinal Newman Society entitled, *Human Sexuality Policies for Catholic Schools* (Guernsey & Donohue, 2018), admission policies vary among Catholic schools across the country (Guernsey, 2016). Catholic schools face increasing public challenges to their teachings and mission. In his article for the Catholic Education Resource Center, “*Serving LGBT Students in Catholic Schools,*” Guernsey (2016) stated that, “Catholic schools must bravely serve all students, including same-sex attracted or gender

dysphoric students, by forthrightly presenting and upholding truth” (para. 4). Citing Pope Pius XI and the Catholic *Code of Canon Law* (c.795), Guernsey (2016) summed up the Catholic mission as striving for “complete formation of the human person that looks to his or her final end...” (para. 7). According to Guernsey and Donohue (2018), Catholic schools continue to be mission driven by staying true to the goals of Catholic education and the teachings of the Catholic Church. The church still holds to the mission of Catholic education, which is the formation of the whole person toward a Christ-centered life with a biblical view of human sexuality (Guernsey & Donohue, 2018).

Private school admission policy challenges do not exist solely in the domain of schools in the United States. Private schools in industrialized countries around the globe grapple with questions surrounding same-sex parents and students who profess to be homosexual or transgender. A study by Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) of admission practices of private schools in Catalonia (Spain) was motivated by the lack of scholarly research on discrimination of children of same-sex couples. The researchers cited an abundance of literature analyzing discrimination against homosexual adults in the workforce and in the housing industry, but studies analyzing discrimination against same-sex families seeking school enrollment for their children and subsequently becoming part of a specific school environment were non-existent.

Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) subsequently conducted what they referred to as an “experimental correspondence design” (p.134) study. The researchers stated that they chose this design because it had “the interesting feature of allowing us to create situations in which people, in our case principals or administrative staff in schools, can interact with fictitious couples who clearly reveal their sexual orientation” (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016, p.134).

For their study, the researchers created three fictitious couples: one gay couple, one lesbian couple, and one heterosexual couple. The experiment took place during the pre-registration period for schools in the Catalonia region of Spain. Pre-registration is required in that region before any school—public or private—can make a decision regarding admission; however, the researchers chose to focus only on private schools ($n = 606$) which accounted for approximately 35% of the schools in Catalonia (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016).

For the experiment, Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) created an email template in which the sexual orientation of each of the homosexual couples was explicitly stated and in which each couple requested a tour of the school in anticipation of their enrolling their child. The researchers sent the email representing heterosexual parents to all the private schools ($n = 606$). Approximately half ($n = 305$) of the private schools in the sample received an email from the fictitious gay couple while the remaining schools ($n = 301$) received an email from the fictitious lesbian couple. To help eliminate gender bias, the heterosexual emails sent to the schools that also received an email from the fictitious gay couple were signed with the heterosexual male's name first. Likewise, the heterosexual emails sent to schools who also received an email from the lesbian couple were signed with the heterosexual female's name first.

Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) collected the data from the experiment by examining the numbers and types of responses via callbacks from the schools. Three different tests were run on the data from both callbacks and callbacks with an invitation. A callback was a response, by the school, acknowledging receipt of the email while a callback with an invitation was a response by a school to have the couple visit the school. Differences in school response rates between gay and heterosexual callbacks and invitations were described using percentages, as were the differences between lesbian and heterosexual callbacks and invitations. When

comparing the callback response rates, researchers reported that 36% of schools in the heterosexual/gay pairing responded to both couples while 24% did not respond to either couple. Response rates for the heterosexual/lesbian pairing indicated 42% of schools responded to both couples while 27% did not respond to either couple. The researchers then compared the schools who replied to only heterosexual or only gay/lesbian couples. The results of the study indicated a net discrimination rate against gay couples of 22%; however, among lesbian couples the net discrimination rate was 3% (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016).

Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) also reported results of the non-parametric McNemar test for paired data. In the McNemar test, the null hypothesis is: $(1) - (2) = 0$ and significance is established at 1%. Researchers reported that:

The results of the paired data test revealed that between gay men and heterosexuals the difference in the call-back probability and the probability of being invited is statistically significant (37.9%) in favor of heterosexuals, whereas these differences are not statistically different from zero if we compare lesbian couples to their heterosexual counterparts (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016, p.139).

In their third analysis, Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016) reported the differences in the rate of callbacks and invitations between gay and lesbian couples. Researchers tested for the difference in proportions for independent samples. The results were statistically significant ($p = .01$), revealing that schools favored lesbian couples over gay couples in both callbacks (9.5%) and invitations (9.6%).

Since the fictitious couples in this experiment (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016) did not formally apply for admission to the private schools, researchers can only speculate as to the actions that would have been taken by the school in terms of acceptance of the child in question.

Diaz-Serrano and Meix-Llop (2016), however, concluded that “it seems to us that the fact that schools are more hesitant about interacting with gay couples than with heterosexual couples is indicative of the fact that some kind of subtle discrimination may exist” (Diaz-Serrano & Meix-Llop, 2016, p. 142).

Davis (2016) posited that lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender (LGBT) issues present a challenge to both pre-service teachers and experienced teachers alike. Utilizing an online survey, Davis (2016) studied 201 pre-service elementary teachers at Florida State University. The survey was designed to measure pre-service teachers’ backgrounds, personal beliefs, levels of comfort when interacting with same-sex parents and their children, self-assessed preparedness, and university coursework related to working with children with same-sex parents. The survey included statements requiring Likert-scaled responses, binary choices, and open-ended questions.

Davis (2016) found an overwhelmingly positive (81%) view of homosexuality and same-sex families among the pre-service teachers surveyed. Davis posited that the results suggested “younger Americans are becoming more accepting of gay men and lesbians and that their increasingly diverse social networks has had a positive impact on their attitudes” (Davis, 2016, p.79). Davis (2016) also found that some pre-service teachers “struggle[d] to reconcile their religious beliefs with their desire to provide a classroom that is safe and inclusive for all children, including those with LGBT parents” (p. 26). Davis (2016) reported “statistically significant results” (p.76) that indicated participants who reported strong religious beliefs have more “negative personal beliefs and attitudes toward children and families headed by same-sex parents,” (p.76) while participants who reported having only mild or moderate religious beliefs

or those who held no religious beliefs “have more positive personal beliefs and attitudes toward children and families headed by same-sex parents”(p.76).

Ninety-five percent of the participants in Davis’s (2016) study had a friend or family member who was part of the LGBT community, and her survey results indicated that pre-service teachers felt comfortable working with same-sex families. The pre-service teachers in this study also reported that they felt prepared to deal with LGBT issues in the classroom, although they felt somewhat intimidated to discuss issues with parents, administrators, and colleagues (Davis, 2016).

Davis (2016) gave a lengthy explanation of her bias to the research and her own life experiences as a mixed-race child and, now, as a partner in an inter-racial marriage. Davis (2016) did not explain ways that she could account for her bias in the research, but noted that she hoped that because of her respect for the public education system, the research agenda in which she is involved, and her commitment to advance the area of diversity education for preservice teachers, that she is able to maintain a professional and impartial perspective throughout this study (p.11).

The lack of scholarly research on the topic of private school admission policies or practices when they involve same-sex families, homosexuality, and transgenderism makes it difficult to either synthesize or corroborate research for the purpose of establishing unity of themes or for the identification of trends in the literature.

Popular Literature

While academia may be slow in responding to private school admission policies related to same-sex families and students with sexual and gender identity issues, popular literature is eager to pick up the slack. Private schools, specifically private Christian schools, have been the

subject of a plethora of media reports around the United States regarding their admission policies. A sampling of the popular literature from the past ten years was reviewed by the researcher to provide an indication of the breadth and focus of the challenges that private schools face related to their admission policies. The popular literature that emerged from an extensive review of available published literature focused exclusively on Christian and Catholic schools. The researcher did not find any popular literature that discussed the admission policies of secular private schools.

In 2010, the *National Catholic Register* reported on Catholic schools in Boston, Massachusetts and Boulder, Colorado that made headlines by denying admission to students with same-sex parents (as reported in Desmond, 2010). At the time, same-sex marriage was already legal in Massachusetts, but not in Colorado. The *Code of Canon Law* (1983, cc. 795, 806) of the Catholic Church authorizes local pastors to administer parish schools in accordance with the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith. The superintendent of Catholic schools in Boston, over-ruling the school's priest, quickly noted that the priest's decision to deny admission to a student with homosexual parents was a mistake and offered to place the child in question in a different parochial school (Desmond, 2010). In a blog post, Cardinal Sean O' Malley of the Archdiocese of Boston gave his support to Father Rafferty, head of the school, positing that Father Rafferty had made a decision "based on an assessment of what he felt would be in the best interest of the child" (O'Malley, 2010). In the Boulder case, James Flynn, Vice Chancellor of the Denver Archdiocese and a canon lawyer, noted that Catholic education is a partnership between the parents and the school and "if the two aren't aligned on human sexuality, human dignity or doctrinal teachings, that partnership can't continue" (Desmond, 2010). The handling and outcome of each admission decision was different, highlighting the delicate balance that

must be maintained by Catholic schools between compassion for non-traditional families and the school's fundamental, core mission.

As Catholic schools grapple with admission decisions regarding children of same-sex parents, the dialogue now includes what to do with applications received from homosexual and transgender students seeking to enroll in a Catholic school and discussions on ways to move forward with current students who identify as homosexual or transgender (Allen, 2016; Benevento, 2017). Despite the clarity of canon law regarding Catholic education, popular media reports on Catholic school admissions tend to present the picture of an educational system in chaos, with a lack of a cohesive policy, and in disagreement over the mission of Catholic education.

Samantha Allen (2016), reporting for *The Daily Beast*, described a confusing situation at a well-known private Catholic academy in Rhode Island that serves students in sixth through twelfth grades. In 2015, the parent-student handbook at the academy was changed to read, “[The] academy is unable to make accommodations for transgender students. Therefore, [the academy] does not accept transgender students nor is [it] able to continue to enroll students who identify as transgender” (as cited in Allen, 2016). In a statement to *The Daily Beast*, a representative of the school said:

The policy was not intended to be discriminatory toward transgendered [sic] students and that it is not the school's intent or desire to exclude transgender students... the policy was put in place for the simple reason that Mount Saint Charles feels that its facilities do not presently provide the school with the ability to accommodate transgender students (Allen, 2016).

David Coletta, an alumnus of the school, learned of the policy change sometime in March of 2016 and immediately posted a petition to social media for the school to “leave the hateful rhetoric in the past [and] accept trans students” (Allen, 2016; Nagle, 2016). By March 9, 2016, the school had apologized and removed its policy statement from the handbook (Allen, 2016).

Benevento (2017) highlighted the differing points of view among Catholic schools around the country in her article “Worry, Hope Arise Over Guidelines for LGBT Students, Families.” In May 2017, the Diocese of Jefferson City, Missouri, wrote guidelines for Catholic schools to use when dealing with LGBT students and “non-traditional” families (Benevento, 2017). The guidelines were published under the title “A Pastoral Process of Accompaniment and Dialogue: Addressing Children and Youth in Response to Gender Concerns and Non-Traditional Families,” and were intended to provide internal guidance to schools in the diocese (Benevento, 2017). The document offered multiple scenarios for considering the admission of a same-sex family, a homosexual or a transgender student, and students with parents who are not married but living together (Aulbur, et al., 2017). The document also provides a flow chart to guide the decision-making process, but states, “Wherever possible, enrollment is the goal” (Aulbur, et al., 2017, p.3). Enrollment is only possible, however, when parents sign and agree to follow “The Covenant of Trust” (Aulbur, et al., 2017, p. 16-17). The signed Covenant is an agreement to support the moral and social doctrines of the Catholic Church and a promise not to speak against the teachings of the church. Charles Presberg, a Catholic professor at the University of Missouri in Columbia in the Jefferson City Diocese, expressed concerns with the document calling it “inconsistent” and “intellectually dishonest” since the first section encourages enrollment but the attached “Covenant of Trust” makes enrollment an impossibility (as cited in Benevento, para. 16, 2017). Benevento (2017) reported that the admission policies of the Springfield, Illinois diocese

welcomed all students but required parents to meet with a pastor and forbade the parents from publicly opposing church teaching. The Diocese of Little Rock, Arkansas published an addendum to their handbook for Catholic schools that included a statement on human sexuality and the conditions under which students who violate Catholic teaching through an expression of same-sex attraction or a desire to change genders could be expelled (Benevento, 2017). The policy stated that the students, parents, and the school should work together to seek a resolution. In the cases in which resolution was unobtainable, the parents would be given the opportunity to withdraw the student before he or she is expelled (Diocese of Little Rock, n.d.).

Reverend Mike Oenbrink, the administrator of a Catholic school on Hilton Head Island, South Carolina came under fire in 2018 when he denied admission to the child of a lesbian couple saying, “We reaffirm the dignity of all human beings, regardless of their beliefs. At the same time, our Catholic schools exist not only to promote academic excellence, but also to build a community of faith and prayer” (as cited in Meyerhofer, 2018). Meyerhofer (2018) further reported that the Diocese of Charlotte, which oversees Oenbrink’s school and 32 other Catholic schools, does not have a diocese-wide policy for the admission of students from same-sex families.

Catholic schools are not the only private schools wrestling with ways to maintain their moral and biblical principles in a culture that is rapidly pushing back and becoming increasingly pro-active regarding the rights of non-traditional families and children. Christian schools often find themselves under attack for supporting biblical perspectives of human sexuality and marriage when making admission decisions and formalizing policies (Baird, 2013; Bohon, 2012; Garrison, 2015). In 2012, a Christian school in Albuquerque, New Mexico denied admission to a three-year-old boy who was being raised by two gay men (Bohon, 2012). Quoting a letter

allegedly sent to the fathers, Bohon (2012) wrote, “same gender couples are inconsistent with scriptural lifestyle and biblical teachings.” The letter cited Romans 1:26-27 as the basis for their decision. The passage from Romans states:

For this reason, God gave them up to dishonorable passions. For their women exchanged natural relations for those that are contrary to nature; and the men likewise gave up natural relations with women and were consumed with passion for one another, men committing shameless acts with men and receiving in themselves the due penalty for their error (Holy Bible, ESV).

In addition, the letter added scripture from 1 Corinthians 6:9 which states, “Or do you not know that the unrighteous will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: neither the sexually immoral, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor men who practice homosexuality” (Holy Bible, ESV) as further support for the decision.

A similar incident occurred at a non-denominational Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee when two gay men were told that another education provider might be a better fit for their family (Garrison, 2015). Quoting the parent handbook, Garrison (2015) noted that all stakeholders of the school must “manifest lifestyle conduct and actions which project an image consistent with the expressed purposes, missions and beliefs of the school” (as cited in Garrison, 2015). The policy allegedly cites homosexuality as an example of the wrong kind of lifestyle. The 2019 website for the academy makes clear that the school is Christian and teaches biblical values; however, the website does not give any indication of admission criteria and does not include a human sexuality statement or any type of policy regarding the admission of same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students.

A private Christian high school in Wichita, Kansas came under fire in 2016 when it reportedly published a “statement of understanding” regarding its admission policy (Glas, 2016). Quoting the statement, Glas (2016) reported the school’s policy:

Given the debate and confusion in our society about marriage and human sexuality it is vital that [the school’s] families agree with and support the school’s traditional, Christian understanding of those issues. Therefore, when the atmosphere or conduct within a particular home is counter to the school’s understanding of a biblical lifestyle, including the practice or promotion of the LGBT (lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender) lifestyle or alternative gender identity, the school should have the right, in its sole discretion, to deny the admission of an applicant or discontinue enrollment of a current student (para. 3).

A spokesperson for the school told Glas (2016) that the school had not and would not deny admission to a child who had a gay sibling. The spokesperson went on to say that the school would not necessarily deny admission to a student professing a same-sex attraction. The point of the statement of understanding was to make clear where the school stood on issues of human sexuality (as cited in Glas, 2016). The school does not condone sexual activity of any kind for its students (Glas, 2016). The 2019 website for the school does not mention human sexuality either in admission, student conduct, or its non-discrimination policy.

Biblical morality policies are not unusual for private Christian schools, but the current researcher found that the policies, covenants, and agreements are often focused on expected student behaviors and parental agreement with the school’s statement of faith rather than admission policy statements for public consumption on the schools’ websites. For example, Baird (2013) reported that a Christian school in Wilmington, North Carolina required families to sign a statement indicating that they would not participate in or support homosexual activity.

The statement noted that the school reserved the right to deny admission to a student whose behavior or family life was contrary to the biblical lifestyle taught by the school (Baird, 2013).

Addressing student behavior, another Christian academy in Wilmington stated in its handbook that homosexual behavior, on or off campus, was prohibited and that violations could lead to a student's suspension or expulsion (Baird, 2013). Morality statements expressing biblical principles are common in religious schools and since most religious schools are private, the policies are legal (Baird, 2013). The problem for private, religious schools in North Carolina arises when parents want to use school vouchers to pay for tuition. School vouchers are typically funded by state taxpayers and bind schools who accept them to specific rules and regulations regarding student enrollment. The 2019 websites of the North Carolina schools mentioned do not indicate whether they accept school vouchers or that they continue to maintain their positions on human sexuality.

The conversation in popular literature regarding non-Catholic Christian schools seems to have broader implications than the case-by-case reporting of Catholic parish school policies or the occasional outrage at a position statement regarding homosexuality or transgenderism. Christian school admission policies influence national conversations on school choice, federal funding, and Titles I, II, and IX (Bowie, 2017; Green, 2017; Slodysko & Danilova, 2017; Swanson, 2015). Most private schools are tuition-dependent, and participation in federal programs can often help smaller schools, in underserved areas, provide services and teacher training that might otherwise be cost prohibitive.

As part of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA), one of the many purposes of the Title I program is "to close the achievement gap between high- and low-performing children, especially the achievement gaps between minority and nonminority

students, and between disadvantaged children and their more advantaged peers” (“Title I,” 2004). The Title II program is designed, in part, to “improve teacher and principal quality and increase the number of highly qualified teachers in the classroom and highly qualified principals and assistant principals in schools” (“Title II,” 2004). Small private schools, both secular and religious, are often eligible to use Title II funds for professional development. Private schools often utilize their Title II allocation, which fluctuates from year-to-year, to send their teachers to training conferences that keep them apprised of trends in education and best practices for the classroom.

Title IX is a comprehensive federal policy that prohibits discrimination, on the basis of gender, by any federally funded education program or activity (“Title IX,” 2018). Title IX is designed to make certain that educational institutions accepting federal funding of any kind do not use the money to support sex discrimination in educational programs and to provide individual citizens effective protections against discriminatory practices (“Title IX,” 2018). Transgender rights remain a grey area under Title IX.

When private religious schools accept federal funding or state education vouchers, their admission policies are then open to public scrutiny. In the aftermath of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), the federal government may, at some point in time, attempt to force religious institutions into choosing between their nonprofit status and their sincerely held beliefs and mission statements. In his article *Collateral Damage: Same-Sex Marriage, Private Religious Schools, and Parental Rights*, Swanson (2015) warned that same-sex marriage is not only an assault on religious liberty but also on the school choice movement. Although there are judicial precedents set by the Supreme Court of the United States in *Meyer v. Nebraska* (1923) and *Pierce v. Society of the Sisters of the Holy Names of Jesus & Mary* (1925) for the support of parental autonomy in

making decisions for their children's education, Swanson (2015) advocated stronger laws that specifically protect religious institutions from being forced "to adopt sexual orientation nondiscrimination policies in order to be eligible for voucher, tax credit/deduction, or educational savings account programs" (para. 1).

Prior to *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), reports of discrimination by religious schools on the grounds of the sexual orientation of parents or students indicated that some of those schools received federal funding (Baird, 2013; Bohon, 2012). However, the key focus of the report appeared to the researcher to be aimed at the tenets of the faith and the use of scripture to guide decision-making. Since the *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) ruling, and the dissemination of sexual identity and transgender directives by President Obama's administration (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016), the LGBT movement has mobilized to challenge Christian school participation in federally funded programs and state school choice initiatives. The sexual orientation and transgender directives came through the U.S. Department of Justice and the U.S. Department of Education in the form of a *Dear Colleague* letter (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). The directives were elaborations on Title IX policies and were specifically aimed at accommodating transgender students (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016). Highlights of the letter, which made clear that compliance was a condition for receiving federal funds, include:

- treating gender identity as the student's sex for the purposes of sports, housing, restroom facilities, and any other gender-segregated area of the institution.
- changing all of a student's legal documents to the gender with which the student self-identifies.
- the appropriate use of gender-pronouns (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016).

Single-gender schools were specifically named as being exempt from the directives, and no mention was made of private schools or religious schools. Although the initiatives were written and disseminated to public schools, one may conclude that the government may one day require private schools that receive federal funds to comply with the *Dear Colleague* (Lhamon & Gupta, 2016) directives.

Writing for the Chicago Tribune, Slodysko and Danilova (2017) reported that a Christian academy in Bloomington, Indiana included a statement in its admission brochure that allowed the school to deny admission to LGBT students because their lifestyle is prohibited according to the Bible. The academy participated in Indiana's school choice program and received \$665,000 in state funds to enroll 152 students in 2016-2017 (Slodysko & Danilova, 2017). Although people in the LGBT community are not a protected class of citizens, opponents of school choice argued that public funds should not be given to private religious institutions that discriminated on the basis of sexual orientation (Slodysko & Danilova, 2017). Though visitors to the school's website may find it a challenge to locate, the academy has published its right to deny admission to or disenroll students who are living outside the biblical lifestyle statement as outlined in the school handbook. The academy continued to participate in Indiana's school choice program as of this writing.

A private Lutheran school in Harford County, Maryland lost its state funding in 2017 when it reserved the right to deny admission to homosexual or transgender students (Bowie, 2017). The school had not denied admission to anyone; it merely published a statement of its right to do so. Bowie (2017), writing for *The Baltimore Sun*, reported that the school could be required to pay back the \$64,284 it had received from state taxpayer funded vouchers. The school enrolled 19 students who were beneficiaries of the voucher program. The state of

Maryland said that the school could not expel the students during the current year, but the students could take their \$4,400 allocation and go elsewhere the following year (Bowie, 2017). The school offered to change the language of the policy to comply with the state of Maryland's non-discrimination policies. However, the board that administered the state's voucher program would not accept the offer citing that the school had defrauded the state by signing a non-discrimination agreement for two years while reserving the right to discriminate (Bowie, 2017).

Human sexuality concerns in education are not limited to K-12 private schools nor confined to the United States. In Nova Scotia, Canada, a Christian law school that specializes in charity law was denied accreditation from the Nova Scotia Barristers' Society because the school required students to adhere "to a covenant allowing sexual intimacy only between a married man and woman" (as cited in Bronskill, 2018). Charity law focuses on providing legal services to non-profit and charitable organizations. Topping (2018) warned that the attack on this university was an attack on the whole idea of community, not a case of evangelical Christianity versus people of "various sexual inclinations" (Topping, 2018). The Supreme Court of Canada's ruling in this case, according to Topping (2018), was

that you may keep your religions, you may own your sincerely formed beliefs, you may form distinctive plans of life... so long as you keep them to yourself. If citizens motivated by love of God are to be so limited, so also in principle are those motivated by other, far lesser loves, like political convictions, like economic doctrines, or, indeed, like sexual preferences (para.9).

According to the popular literature reviewed for this dissertation, schools that have published policies regarding human sexuality, biblical definitions of marriage, or statements that preserve the school's right to deny admission to same-sex families or homosexual and

transgender students are under attack. Schools that deny admission on the grounds of sexual practice or gender dysphoria but do not have a written policy are also under attack. When Justice Clarence Thomas wrote his dissent in the case of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015), he said the “inversion of the original meaning of liberty...will likely cause collateral damage to other aspects of our constitutional order that protect liberty . . . It appears all but inevitable that [civil and religious marriage] will come into conflict” (*Obergefell v. Hodges*, 2015). Popular literature indicates that Justice Thomas’s prophetic warnings may be coming to fruition.

Professional and Trade-Specific Literature

Associations of independent private schools, such as the *National Association of Independent Schools* (NAIS), are primarily involved with secular schools, but they do not discriminate against religious schools for membership. These types of associations provide members with advice on trends and best-practices in private education, but a review of the current literature did not yield any specific literature addressing same-sex families or human sexuality concerns in admission policies of member schools.

Recent literature available to Catholic and Christian schools does provide some guidance on matters of same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism. The *Catholic Education Resource Center*, an online resource for Catholic schools in the United States and Canada, exists to help schools articulate orthodox Catholic understanding on moral, social, and religious matters (Fields, 2019). Unfortunately, minimal guidance related to admission policies is available at the resource center, leaving Catholic schools with a broad range of policies for parish schools.

Christian schools fare slightly better in the information arena if they are members of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI publishes the *Legal Legislative Update* (LLU), a trade journal dedicated to legal and legislative issues concerning non-profit

religious education. ACSI has been proactive in advising their member schools when it comes to making decisions about same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. The *Legal Legislative Update*, however, is only available to members of ACSI.

The Christian Legal Society (2015) published a 23-page booklet entitled *Religious Schools & Colleges: Guidance for Same-Sex Issues*. The Christian Legal Society (2015) advised schools that there are three specific phrases that must be used for a good admission policy:

1. “full disclosure”;
2. “routine standard of practice”;
3. “clarity of commitment” (Christian Legal Society, 2015, p.18).

Full disclosure requires that a Christian school fully disclose to potential students and their families, at various points throughout the admission process, that they are a religious entity that exists for a religious purpose (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Furthermore, Christian schools should fully disclose that they adhere to biblical standards in their teaching, conduct, and expectations (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Any violation of that standard is cause for dismissal (Christian Legal Society, 2015). In addition to verbal and written disclosure, the religious purpose of the school and its biblical standards should appear in multiple places including information packets, applications for admission, and in student and parent handbooks (Christian Legal Society, 2015).

A routine standard of practice refers to the practice, by schools, of following the same procedures for every new applicant (Christian Legal Society, 2015). When there is a standard practice, any representative of the school can honestly say that all applications and admission decisions are handled the same way (Christian Legal Society, 2015). The school does not treat

anyone differently than someone else during the admission process or in all processes, and that fact can be verified through the consistency of practice (Christian Legal Society, 2015).

Clarity of commitment indicates that the applicant understands and is committed to the mission, values, and religious teachings of the school (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Even when a school has fully disclosed its religious values multiple times and clearly followed a regular procedure, the signature of a parent is the most powerful evidence to have on record (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Parents should provide signatures on admission packets, applications, and handbooks to affirm that they have read the information (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Parent signatures are an indication that the parent(s) understands the curricula that will be taught and acknowledges the conduct that is expected (Christian Legal Society, 2015). The Christian Legal Society (2015) suggested that admission policies and practices that focus on these three elements can lay a solid foundation for a defense of any school's admission policies should the need arise.

The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) is another organization that provides services to Christian organizations. The ADF's legal guide, *Protecting Your Ministry* (2018) is aimed at helping Christian schools, churches, and other Christian organizations take necessary precautions to protect themselves from critics who oppose their biblical worldview and practices. The ADF provides real-life cases of ministries that have come under attack and gives advice unique to each type of ministry (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). The ADF's advice to schools is not as specific and pointed as the directives provided by CLS, but it is imminently helpful. ADF advises all schools to a) create a distinctly religious mission statement; b) create a code of Christian conduct for students, staff, faculty, and administrators, and; c) emphasize the organization's religious character (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). For schools that need

more direct guidance, the ADF refers readers to its website (adflegal.org) to download sample documents.

Summary

This review of relevant literature indicates a dearth of scholarly research addressing admission policies of private secular and religious schools and ways in which private schools can maintain their fundamental beliefs and educational philosophies in a rapidly changing culture. Popular literature, however, has filled the gap by reporting incidents of Catholic parish schools and Christian schools that denied admission to children with same-sex parents and/or established policies that could deny admission of homosexual and transgender students to the school. Although private religious schools have the right to maintain policies that support biblical teachings, popular literature has framed the discussion in a way that forces religious schools to work reactively for damage control. While the Association of Christian Schools International has kept its members informed and has offered advice through its *Legislative Legal Updates*, the updates are only available to member schools. Since 2015, several Christian organizations, such as the Christian Legal Society and the Alliance Defending Freedom, have stepped forward with professional publications that walk schools through the process of protecting their ministries while preparing them for possible legal action.

As Christian researchers study the relationship between the individual student and the school community and consider both the short-term and the long-term views of sexual identity, the researchers must add to the body of scholarly literature and discuss the empirical evidence to provide balance to anecdotal popular literature. Christian educators must stay informed and up to date in their reading of the professional literature and the challenges to the rights of faith-based schools so they can make informed decisions regarding their own schools' policies. The

current study is designed to add to the body of scholarly literature on private schools and their admission policies considering the rapidly changing social and legal standards. The methods used to explore the admission policies of private secular and religious schools are discussed in chapter three.

III. METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine whether private religious and secular schools have codified policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. A second purpose was to identify the principles that guide admission policy decisions and the consequences of those decisions on private schools and their stakeholders.

Chapter three of this study features a description of the procedures used for data collection and analysis. This non-experimental, exploratory study collected both quantitative and qualitative data from private school administrators, teachers, and board members across the United States. The study was conducted as a mixed-methods, triangulation design which collected quantitative and qualitative data simultaneously through both a widely distributed online survey and five semi-structured interviews of private Christian school administrators. Both sets of data were given equal weight in the study, as recommended by Creswell and Clark (2017). This chapter includes a description of the study's sample, instrumentation, data collection procedures, and the analyses employed for each of the respective research questions posed.

Description of the Methodology

Design

The study was a non-experimental, descriptive study that used an online, anonymous

survey (see Appendix A) disseminated to private secular and private religious school administrators, and personal interviews (see Appendix B) of five Christian school administrators. The survey included both Likert-scale items and open-ended items. In addition, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews to better understand the underlying policies and decision-making processes when considering admission applications from students with same-sex parents or from students who self-identify as gay, lesbian, or transgender.

Participants

Respondents to the online survey composed a purposive sample of convenience of private school administrators and other decision-makers, which included K-12 representation of private secular schools, religious schools, boarding schools, single gender schools, and participants from all regions of the United States.

The survey sample's population was comprised of administrators and decision-makers of any private school in the United States that had a website. The researcher found lists of private schools in every community and state in the US on *Niche.com*, a consumer research website. From the list of schools, the researcher randomly selected six schools from each of the fifty states and from at least four different cities in each state. Administrators ($n = 300$) from the selected schools were emailed an invitation to take the survey. Approximately 32% ($n = 101$) of those invited to participate responded to the survey. In addition, five survey respondents volunteered to participate in an interview. Four of the interviewees were heads of Christian schools and one was a board member of a Christian school. The five interviewees lived in four different states.

Instrumentation

Online survey. Building upon the survey questions used by Coley (2012), the researcher designed a survey (Appendix A) to collect demographic information of the respondents and their responses related to the research questions. Due to the somewhat sensitive nature of the research topic, the researcher believed that the anonymous nature of an online survey would encourage more participants and would be more conducive to elicitation of honest responses. The demographic items in the survey addressed the types of private schools represented, grade levels served, the region of the country in which the school was located, and other variables. The remaining items were designed to collect information related to the proposed research questions.

The survey asked a mixture of question types with a mixture of response types. Questions requiring a *yes* or *no* response were used to identify trends in the admission policy decisions of private schools, while Likert-type items were used to measure the factors that decision-makers take into consideration when making an admission decision and the perceived results of the admission policy decisions on the school and its stakeholders. All survey questions specifically addressed private school admission policies for students with same-sex parents, self-identified homosexual students, and self-identified transgender students.

A draft survey, using a small sample of convenience ($n = 5$), was piloted, and respondents provided suggestions for revising items, terminology, and response types. Five private school administrators participated in the survey's pilot study and offered suggestions which were ultimately incorporated into the final survey depicted in Appendix A. A panel of experts composed of the dissertation committee validated the survey items before the survey was disseminated.

Interviews. The semi-structured interview questions (Appendix B) were validated by the

dissertation committee and designed by the researcher to probe more deeply into the factors that private Christian school administrators consider when making decisions to approve or deny admission to students of same-sex parents or to students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender. The interview questions were designed to provide important insights into admission decisions and the results of the admission policies on a school's culture and its stakeholders.

Data Collection

After approval by the Institutional Review Board (IRB) at the sponsoring university, email invitations to participate in the survey were sent electronically in January 2019. The email included the informed consent to participate in the survey, the online survey link, and contact information of the researcher, the principal investigator, and the IRB. In addition, survey invitations were posted in the online member community forum of *Kappa Delta Pi*, an international honor society in education, as well as on *LinkedIn®*, and the Southeastern University's Doctor of Education Facebook page. The survey was hosted on the *SurveyMonkey™* server.

SurveyMonkey™ maintained the data collected from the surveys, provided basic summary statistics, and allowed for eventual export of the raw data for further analysis by the researcher. When the data collection window closed after 60 days, 101 private school leaders had responded to the survey.

Five survey participants emailed the researcher and volunteered to participate in an interview to discuss admission policies at their schools. Volunteers received an email with an attached Adult Consent for Interview (Appendix C) prior to the interview. All interview consent forms were signed and returned to the researcher prior to the start of the interviews. At the beginning of each interview, the researcher reviewed the consent form and received verbal

confirmation of the participant's willingness to continue. Using a semi-structured interview protocol (Appendix B), the researcher conducted face-to-face interviews with two private school administrators in their respective offices on the campuses of their schools. Two interviewees participated by telephone, and one interviewee responded to the interview questions in writing via email.

The face-to-face and telephone interviews were recorded on an Olympus VN-541PC voice recorder. Backup recordings for face-to face interviews were made simultaneously using the REV™ voice recording app for iPhone®. Telephone interviews were backed up simultaneously using the REV™ call recording app for the iPhone 6S®. The researcher transcribed each interview and assigned a code to each transcript in order to protect the privacy of the respondents. In addition, the researcher redacted all personal and school identifiers in the transcripts.

Data Analysis

Preliminary Analyses

Prior to formal analysis of the survey data ($n = 101$), preliminary analyses were conducted to ensure that each respondent represented a school that met the criteria for inclusion in the survey's sample. The first five questions of the 18-question on-line survey asked for the demographic information that was used to identify qualified respondents. Demographic information in survey items one through five included the official position held by the respondent in his or her school, the type and size of the school, the grade levels served, and the regional location of the school.

Survey item two asked: *How would you classify your school?* The response to this question provided the essential demographic data used to determine whether to include a

respondent in the survey population. Fifteen respondents identified their schools as “other,” but only ten of those respondents provided an explanation indicating that they were a private secular or religious school. Five schools did not meet the essential requirement of operating as a private secular or religious school. Two identified as a “town academy,” one as a public elementary school, one as a public high school, and one as a public charter school. Sixteen respondents completed some or all the demographic information and then exited without completing the survey; responses from those participants were eliminated from further analyses.

In total, 21 respondents either failed to complete the survey or failed to meet the essential demographic requirements for the study. These 21 respondents were removed from the survey data set, leaving a survey population of 80 qualified respondents.

The transcript for each individual interviewee was emailed to the interviewee for validation and verification. One participant asked for additional redactions, and one participant asked to clarify a previous statement. The wording changes did not have any bearing on the quality of the responses, nor did they change the intent of the original response. The researcher made the changes and incorporated them into the final transcript for analysis. All five interviewees remained in the interview sample and were included in the qualitative analyses.

The researcher organized the qualitative data from the open-ended survey items into categories related to mission statement, same-sex policy, homosexual student policy, or transgender policy. Survey responses addressed research questions one, two, and three.

Analyses by Research Question

Question 1: Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?

Survey questions seven, nine, and eleven were binary choice (yes/no) items. Descriptive statistics were computed and reported as frequencies and percentages for all respondents; these data indicated the number of schools with admission policies addressing students of same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students. Each of the survey items for which a “Yes” answer was given asked the respondent to copy and paste the part of the school’s admission policy that addressed each type of student in the study. The researcher coded the school policies ($n = 48$) and analyzed the statements qualitatively in order to categorize the underlying philosophy used to guide admission decisions.

Question 2: Have private schools re-examined or changed their admission policies to address the admission of students with same-sex parents and students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

Research question two was addressed by survey items 13 and 14. Question 13 required a binary choice (yes/no) response, while question 14 asked for a Likert-scale response. The binary choice (yes/no) responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics and reported as frequencies and percentages. Responses to the Likert-scale items were computed and reported as frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Respondents were provided an opportunity to comment on or explain their responses. The researcher coded the optional comments ($n = 37$) qualitatively and reported them as possible explanations for the quantitative results.

Question 3: What factors influence the admission policies of private schools with regard to admission of a student with same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

Research question three was addressed by question 16, a Likert-scaled survey item regarding the importance of various factors a school administrator might consider when making

an admission decision related to students with same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender. The researcher compiled the responses to this item and analyzed them using frequencies, means, and standard deviations. Respondents' optional comments to survey question 16 probed the philosophical underpinnings and rationale for the admission decisions.

Question 4: How do admission policies related to students from same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students shape a private school's culture and, subsequently the views of the stakeholders?

Responses to five semi-structured interviews addressed research question four. The researcher recorded and transcribed four of the five interviews; the fifth interviewee submitted written responses to the survey questions. After all the interviews were transcribed by the researcher, each interviewee received a transcript of his or her interview for the purpose of validating the information. The researcher then coded the interview responses. Meanings were formed from the repetition of words, key words in context (KWIC), and significant statements and then sorted into themes. The themes were color-coded, clustered, and then categorized.

Optional comments given by survey respondents to each survey question were also coded and categorized. Significant statements were analyzed for emergent themes. Results of the survey responses and the qualitative data gathered from the interviews were subsequently triangulated to describe a comprehensive picture of admission policies related to homosexual and/or transgender families and students in this sample of private school administrators and other stakeholders.

Summary

This chapter described the research methods employed in this non-experimental, exploratory research study of private school admission policies in the United States as they apply to students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. The results of the survey and interviews are presented in chapter four.

IV. RESULTS

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine whether private religious and private secular schools have admission policies in place that specifically address the acceptance or denial of children with same-sex parents or homosexual and transgender students. A secondary purpose of the study was to identify the principles that guide admission policy decisions and the influence of those decisions on private schools and their stakeholders.

This non-experimental, exploratory study was designed by the researcher to collect both descriptive and qualitative data from private religious and private secular school administrators across the United States through an on-line survey (see Appendix A) as well as through semi-structured interviews (see Appendix B) of non-randomly selected private school administrators. Four research questions guided the study and subsequent analyses:

1. Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?
2. Have private schools re-examined or changed their admission policies to address admission of students with same-sex parents and students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?
3. What factors influence the admission policies of private schools with regard to admission of students who have same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

4. How do admission policies related to students from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students shape a private school's culture and, subsequently, the views of stakeholders?

Responses to the anonymous online survey addressed the first three research questions and the semi-structured interviews addressed research question four. Chapter four presents both the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey; in addition, a qualitative analysis of each of the administrator interviews, as well as the themes that emerged individually and collectively, will be described.

Survey Results

Following the preliminary analysis of the survey data described in chapter three, both descriptive and qualitative analyses were conducted on the final data set ($n = 80$).

Demographic Results

The first five items in the survey collected demographic information about the respondents and their respective schools. The first item asked the role of the respondent at his or her school. Sixty-three of the 80 respondents (78.5%) identified themselves as a principal, headmaster, or administrator. Six respondents (7.50%) identified themselves as directors of admissions, and five respondents (6.25%) self-identified as teachers. Other roles represented in the responses were counselors ($n = 2$), a board member, an office manager, an educational director, and an administrative consultant.

Item two was an essential demographic question and was used to determine whether the respondent represented a private school. Faith-based schools ($n = 61$) accounted for 76.25% of the survey respondents. The survey offered a response option of "International," but there were no international school respondents. Within the broad terms "religious" and "secular," there

were several categories. Table 1 indicates the types of schools represented by survey respondents. While the majority of the survey sample's respondents were from private religious schools (76%), the representation is only slightly higher than the national percentage (70%) of religious schools (Broughman, Kincel, and Peterson, 2019).

Table 1

Number and Percentage of Survey Responses to School Types Item

Type of School	<i>n</i>	%
Christian		
Non-denominational	28	35.0
Church-affiliated	12	15.0
Catholic	15	18.7
Secular		
Non-religious	17	21.2
Single-gender	2	2.5
Other		
Jewish	1	1.2
University-affiliated	2	2.5
Denominational, non-church affiliated ^a	2	2.5
Christian mission affiliated	1	1.2

Note. ^aBoth denominational, non-church affiliated schools identified themselves as Episcopal.

Demographic item three asked the size of the school in terms of student population. Options ranged from <100 to 1000 or more. Each school size was represented by both religious and non-religious schools. The greatest number of respondents ($n = 22$) identified their school as having a population of 250-499 students which accounted for 27.5% of the survey sample. The remaining responses included: less than 100 students ($n = 11$), 100 – 249 ($n = 14$), 500 – 699 ($n = 11$), 700 – 999 ($n = 10$), and 1000 or more ($n = 11$).

Survey item four asked about the grade levels served by the schools responding to the survey. Of the 80 respondents to this item, 27 (33.75%) selected “other,” requiring the

researchers to look at each individual school. The survey answer options began with kindergarten, but 81% ($n = 22$) of respondents who chose the “other” option indicated that their schools serve pre-kindergarten children. There were no respondents from schools that served only sixth through eighth grades, but 14.8% ($n = 4$) of respondents specified that they served grades seven through twelve.

Item five, the final demographic item, asked in which region of the United States the respondent’s school was located. The Southeast region of the US was the largest region represented ($n = 24$) while the Northwest region had the least number of responses ($n = 4$). Table 2 provides the regional distribution of respondents to the online survey.

Table 2

Distribution of Private School Survey Respondents by Region ($n = 80$)

Regions	n	%
Southeast ^a	24	30.0
Midwest ^b	17	21.25
New England ^c	10	12.50
Southwest ^d	10	12.50
West ^e	8	10.0
Mid-Atlantic ^f	7	8.75
Northwest ^g	4	5.0

Note. ^aFlorida, Georgia, North Carolina, South Carolina, Kentucky, Tennessee, Alabama, Mississippi, Louisiana, Arkansas. ^bOhio, Indiana, Michigan, Illinois, Missouri, Wisconsin, Minnesota, Iowa, Kansas, Nebraska, North Dakota, South Dakota. ^cMaine, Vermont, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, Connecticut. ^dNew Mexico, Oklahoma, Arizona, Texas. ^eColorado, Wyoming, Montana, Utah, Nevada, California, Hawaii. ^fPennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, West Virginia, Delaware, New Jersey, New York. ^gIdaho, Oregon, Washington, Alaska.

Descriptive Survey Results

Survey items required different types of responses from the participants. Survey item response types included binary responses (yes/no; $n = 9$ items), Likert-scaled responses ($n = 2$ items), and a multiple-choice question ($n = 1$ item). Based on the answers selected, respondents were asked for additional information regarding their schools' written and unwritten policies. Binary responses, Likert-scaled items, and multiple-choice answers are reported in this section and followed in the next section by the qualitative results of open-ended items.

The first two policy survey items (items 7 and 8) addressed the admission policies regarding students from same-sex families. Respondents were asked in survey item seven: "Does your school have an official admission policy regarding students from same-sex families?" Survey item eight was a follow-up question to item seven and asked respondents: "Has your school accepted students from same-sex families for admission?"

The next pair of policy items in the survey (items 9 and 10) asked private school respondents the same questions about policies regarding school admission of self-identified homosexual students. Survey item nine, related to the existence of an admission policy for homosexual students, asked: "Does your school have an admission policy regarding the admission of homosexual students?" The follow-up question, survey item ten, asked respondents: "Has your school accepted homosexual students for admission?"

The final pair of policy items (items 11 and 12) addressed admission of transgender students with the same questions. Survey item 11 asked: "Does your school have an admission policy regarding the admission of transgender students?" The follow-up question, survey item 12, asked respondents: "Has your school accepted transgender students for admission?"

The survey item responses, depicted in Table 3, indicate policies and practices by student type: students with same-sex parents, students who self-identify as homosexual, and students who self-identify as transgender.

Table 3

Admission Policies and Practices by Target Group.

Responses (<i>n</i> = 80)	Faith-Based		Secular	
Admission policy	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)
Same-sex families	14 (17.50)	47 (58.75)	2 (2.50)	17 (21.25)
Homosexual students	20 (25.0)	41 (51.25)	4 (5.0)	15 (18.75)
Transgender students	19 (23.75)	42 (52.50)	4 (5.0)	15 (18.75)
Policy to accept/deny	Accept <i>n</i> (%)	Deny <i>n</i> (%)	Accept <i>n</i> (%)	Deny <i>n</i> (%)
Same-sex families (<i>n</i> = 16)	3 (18.75)	11(68.75)	2 (12.50)	0
Homosexual students (<i>n</i> = 24)	6 (25.0)	14 (58.0)	4 (17.0)	0
Transgender students (<i>n</i> = 23)	6 (26.0)	13 (57.0)	4 (17.0)	0
Admitted previously	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)	Yes <i>n</i> (%)	No <i>n</i> (%)
Same-sex families ^a	22 (27.50)	35 (43.75)	18 (22.50)	1 (1.25)
Homosexual students ^b	23 (28.75)	35 (43.75)	17 (21.25)	2 (2.50)
Transgender students ^c	10 (12.50)	50 (62.50)	13 (16.25)	6 (7.50)

Note. ^aFour respondents(5%) from faith-based schools did not know if students with same-sex parents had been admitted to the school. ^bThree respondents(3.75%) from faith-based schools did not know if homosexual students had been admitted to the school. ^cOne respondent (1.25%) from a faith-based school did not know if a transgender student had been previously admitted to the school.

A “No” response regarding whether a school had an official admission policy in place for children of same-sex couples, homosexual, or transgender students was not necessarily an indication that the school does not have an internal bias regarding admitting such students. Additionally, when schools were asked if they had accepted students from same-sex families and

homosexual or transgender students, “No” responses were not necessarily an indication that schools conversely denied admission to such a student. Some comments from respondents indicated that their schools had not received applications from any of the student groups in the study. Additional comments provided by respondents will be presented in the qualitative results section of this chapter, as well in the discussion of chapter five.

The remaining survey items (items 13 – 18) sought information on the development of schools’ admission policies in terms of when the policy was created or updated, factors taken into consideration when the policy was developed, and the transparency of the policy. Survey item 13 asked: “Was your school’s current admission policy created in response to an admission decision regarding students from same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students?” Two schools, both faith-based, non-denominational, private Christian schools, reported that their current admission policy was created in response to an admission decision. Three respondents were unsure. Seventy-five respondents (93.75%) stated that their school’s current policy was not a response to any type of admission decision regarding a student with same-sex parents, a homosexual, or as transgender student.

When respondents of schools that had never encountered the types of admission scenarios under study ($n = 67$) were asked about the likelihood of admitting students from same-sex families, homosexual or transgender students, 67 respondents answered either *very unlikely*, *unlikely*, *likely*, or *very likely*. Table 4 displays the results of survey item 13.

Table 4

Survey Responses Regarding Likelihood of Schools to Admit Types of Students (n = 67)

Student Type	1 Very Unlikely <i>n</i> (%)	2 Unlikely <i>n</i> (%)	3 Likely <i>n</i> (%)	4 Very Likely <i>n</i> (%)	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
With Same-Sex Parents	20 (29.85)	11 (16.40)	12 (17.90)	24 (35.80)	2.59	1.25
Homosexual	24 (35.80)	11 (16.40)	11 (16.40)	21 (31.30)	2.43	1.26
Transgender	30 (44.80)	13 (19.40)	4 (6.0)	20 (29.85)	2.20	1.28

A follow-up survey item (item 14) asked respondents to indicate the title of the primary person charged with decisions regarding the acceptance or denial of admission to children with same-sex parents, homosexual, or transgender students. Table 5 indicates the individuals or groups who were the primary decision-makers with regard to admission decisions.

Table 5

Survey Responses Regarding the Individuals or Groups Responsible for Making Admission Decisions (n = 80)

Decision Maker	<i>n</i>	%
Admissions Committee	30	37.50
Administrator	30	37.50
School Board	11	13.75
Church	2	2.50
Counselor	0	0
Other ^a	7	8.75

NOTE: ^aOther included a Leadership Team (*n* = 3), an Educational Director (*n* = 1), a sponsoring university (*n* = 1), the values of the school mission (*n* = 1), and no one to make a decision (*n* = 1).

Survey item 16 asked respondents ($n = 80$) to choose from among five factors that their respective schools considered important when making an admission decision about students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. Table 6 describes the responses related to the factors that influenced admission decisions. The means were computed based on a 4-point Likert scale.

Table 6

Survey Responses Regarding the Factors that Influenced Admission Decisions

Factor	1 Not Important n (%)	2 Somewhat Important n (%)	3 Important n (%)	4 Very Important n (%)	M	SD
School Mission ($n = 68$)	1 (1.47)	1 (1.47)	16 (23.53)	50 (73.53)	3.69	0.57
School Culture ($n = 62$)	3 (4.84)	4 (6.45)	10 (16.13)	45 (72.58)	3.56	0.82
Attitudes of Faculty ($n = 57$)	14 (24.56)	12 (21.05)	12 (21.05)	19 (33.33)	2.63	1.18
Attitudes of Current Families ($n = 56$)	15 (26.79)	13 (23.21)	9 (16.07)	19 (33.33)	2.57	1.21
Biblical Doctrine ($n = 66$)	18 (27.27)	5 (7.58)	12 (18.18)	31 (46.97)	2.84	1.27

NOTE: Sixteen respondents offered additional comments to suggest factors important to their schools or to elaborate upon the answers they had given. Those comments are presented in the qualitative results section of this chapter.

The final two survey items asked about the transparency of a school's admission policies. Item 17 asked: "Does your admission policy appear on your school website?" Forty-six of 80 respondents (57.50%) said "Yes," while 34 respondents (42.50%) indicated "No." When asked if a visitor to the school's website could readily discern the school's admission policy about students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students (item 18), 60% said

“No.” Eighteen respondents left explanatory comments that will be presented in the next section on qualitative survey results.

Qualitative Survey Results

Two types of open-ended survey items are presented in this section. The first type asked respondents to identify official policy statements (items 6, 7, 9, and 11). The second type included the optional comments respondents gave by way of expounding upon survey item responses.

Official policy statements.

Item 6: What is the mission statement of the school? Respondents were asked to provide their schools’ mission statements for additional explanatory insights into philosophies that guide policy decisions. Coding of mission statements to determine general themes was outside the scope of this study; however, 74% of respondents ($n = 50$) claimed that the school’s mission was “very important” to making admission decisions about students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students (see Table 6).

Item 7: What is the school’s policy on the admission of children with same-sex parents? Respondents who stated that their school had a policy regarding the admission of students from same-sex families were asked to state the policy. Sixteen respondents (20%) reported that they had a policy and provided either the actual policy statement or a summation of the policy. Additionally, three respondents who indicated “No” to the item provided explanations that were, in practice, policies and were integrated into the policy analysis by the researcher. The 19 reported policies were cross-referenced with school type, then evaluated, categorized, and coded for themes. Policies were divided into four categories from which two dominant themes emerged. The categories included: (a) schools that did not admit students of

same-sex parents, (b) schools that admitted students of same-sex parents, (c) schools that followed the policy of another institution, and (d) schools that admitted students of same-sex parents with caveats.

Two dominant themes emerged from the open-ended policy item regarding students with homosexual parents. The first theme defined marriage, and the second theme emphasized non-discrimination. Ten non-denominational Christian schools reported that their policies were based on a biblical definition of marriage. All definitions supplied by respondents included a reference to marriage as a relationship between one man and one woman; in addition, half of the definitions were supported with scriptural notations from the Bible. Words such as “covenantal,” “exclusive,” and “solemn union” were used to describe the marriage relationship. Seven responses to the item described sexual intimacy as reserved for marriage. Respondents further described sexual activity outside the bonds of biblical marriage or that deviated from the biblical definition of marriage as sin.

Respondents from two non-religious schools, one Catholic school, and one Episcopal school identified statements of non-discrimination that served as their policy for admission decisions. One respondent simply wrote, “We don’t discriminate.” Two respondents specified that they do not discriminate on the basis of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation. Addressing same-sex families specifically, a respondent from one school wrote, “Our admission policy is to treat students from same-sex families the same as students from different-sex families.”

Item 9: What is the school’s policy regarding the admission of homosexual students?

Respondents were asked to use the comment box to post their school’s specific policy for addressing the admission of homosexual students. Thirty percent ($n = 24$) of the survey

respondents affirmed that their school had an existing admission policy that addressed homosexual applicants. Two respondents who responded “No” to the survey commented that a policy of some type was followed. Those two schools were included in the qualitative policy analysis of this item.

The researcher examined the responses ($n = 26$) to the open-ended policy item nine and placed them into one of four categories: (a) schools who have a specific admission policy to offer or deny admission to homosexual students ($n = 6$), (b) schools with an indirect policy regarding the admission of homosexual students ($n = 8$), (c) faith-based schools that accept homosexual students ($n = 4$), and (d) schools with an unwritten policy of non-discrimination ($n = 8$).

An analysis of the policy statements from each category produced two dominant themes regarding the admission of homosexual students. The first theme pointed to the ambiguous nature of indirect policies at addressing admission of homosexual students. The second theme revolved around the precept that sin is sin.

Schools labeled by the researcher as having an indirect policy regarding admission of homosexual students were schools who had statements of faith, biblical morality statements, lifestyle statements, and/or a definition of marriage. The survey respondents cited these statements as admission policies, but the policies did not address admission requirements nor the ways they were applied to decision-making. None of the indirect policies disclosed whether or not school officials would deny admission to homosexual students based on the policy.

Statements from indirect policies included:

“[The school] reserves (or retains) the right to deny admission...or discontinue enrollment...”

“[Parents] agree to support these and other basic biblical values...”

“We ask that all parents...agree with and abide by our statement of faith...”

“The school requires parents and students to abide by the Statement on Marriage and Sexuality.”

The policies of faith-based schools that admitted homosexual students tended to view sexual activity of its students as sin regardless of whether the activity was homosexual or heterosexual. Comments included:

“We see Homosexuality as part of the fall of mankind... Students are not permitted to participate in homosexual activity (nor heterosexual activity.) ...they must agree to not promote an LGBT lifestyle (as well as a promiscuous heterosexual lifestyle).”

“[As] with all forms of immorality and sex outside of marriage, it is one thing to identify with a behavior, it’s totally another to act on that inclination, as with any sin.”

“We believe any form of sexual immorality, including but not limited to adultery, fornication, homosexual conduct, bisexual conduct...is sinful and contrary to God’s Word.”

Item 11: What is the school’s policy regarding the admission of transgender students?

As with students of same-sex parents and homosexual students, respondents answering “Yes” ($n = 23$) to their schools’ having a policy for the admission of transgender students were asked to state the policy. The researcher evaluated, categorized, and coded the responses ($n = 17$) to this open-ended item for emergent themes. The categories for admission policies of transgender students included: (a) schools with non-discrimination policies ($n = 7$), (b) schools with a marriage and/or human sexuality statement ($n = 3$), (c) schools who had a specific policy for transgender students ($n = 3$), (d) schools who had a policy for transgender students but did not

have a policy for homosexual students ($n = 2$), and (e) schools who used the policy of another institution ($n = 2$).

Schools with non-discrimination policies were the same schools who applied the policy across all types of applicants and clearly stated they did not discriminate on the basis of gender or gender identity. Likewise, schools with marriage and/or human sexuality statements asked the researcher to refer to the policies that had been stated in previous responses. Responses for policies that referred specifically to gender included statements such as:

“Alternative gender identity is a form of sexual immorality.”

“Transgender identity or any violation of the unique roles of males and females are to be avoided.”

“Any attempt to change one’s biological sex or identify as anything other than one’s biological sex...is sinful and contrary to God’s word.”

As with same-sex parents and homosexual students, these statements, while foundational to the educational institutions, did not appear to directly address admission to the school, nor did the statements appear to be a *de facto* admission policy. Schools that used the policies of sponsoring institutions did not state those policies; as a result, no conclusions could be drawn.

Two respondents identified a policy of non-admission for transgender students but did not have policies for homosexual students. The first respondent wrote, “It’s clearly stated in our enrollment agreement,” but the respondent did not elaborate on the specifics of the agreement. The second respondent represented an all-male, Catholic school that did not discriminate against homosexual students or students with same-sex parents. The school’s policy specifically stated that the school only admitted students “identified by their biological sex, at birth, as male.” The school further defined biological sex as that which is determined “by a person’s sexual anatomy,

chromosomes, and hormones.” Three schools, all non-denominational Christian schools, stated that students would be identified according to their biological gender at birth.

Optional survey comments. Most survey items included a comment box in which respondents could elaborate upon their schools’ positions. The researcher coded each comment as it related to the specific question; all comments were then evaluated holistically to look for emergent themes that could explain the overarching views and experiences of the survey’s sample. The themes are briefly presented here while their application to the research questions will be discussed in chapter five.

Theme one: Non-discrimination. Survey respondents from all non-religious private schools ($n = 19$), a Jewish school, and one Catholic school reported that their admission policies were written or unwritten policies of non-discrimination. Respondents from schools that had a published statement of non-discrimination wanted to make it clear that the school did not discriminate on the basis of gender, gender identity, or sexual orientation when it came to admission to the school or participation in any of the school’s programs. The common response to questions about same-sex parents, homosexual, or transgender students was simply, “We do not discriminate.”

Several respondents from faith-based schools intimated that they did not discriminate with regard to students from same-sex families nor homosexual and transgender students but included the caveat that students and parents were required to agree with and support the biblical instruction of the school. One such respondent identified his or her school as one with open-enrollment and explained that the school would enroll students with same-sex parents and homosexual students “so long as they [parents and students] understand that we will teach a traditional orthodox definition of marriage and [they] do not try to prohibit that from happening.”

The same respondent noted that transgender students would also be admitted, but they would be identified by their biological sex. A respondent from a religious school in the Midwest which received state taxpayer funds through the state's educational voucher program expressed similar sentiments. Overall, respondents that reported a practice of non-discrimination were interested in accepting students who had a good work ethic, showed kindness and compassion, and who would become a contributing member of the school community. Schools were not amenable to students who militantly promoted a particular political or social agenda nor students who would challenge the values and honor codes of the schools.

Theme two: Biological gender. Single-gender schools ($n = 2$) were evenly split in their approaches to admissions. The respondent from an all-male Catholic high school specifically stated in the admission policy that the school would only accept biological males. A respondent from an all-female school commented that her school had girls who self-identified as “gender non-conforming,” although the school had not specifically offered or denied admission to a transgender female, the respondent said the school would be “likely” to accept a transgender student.

Respondents from faith-based schools who had accepted ($n = 7$) or were likely to accept transgender students ($n = 4$) stated that students would be identified by their biological sex at birth due to the Christian nature of the school and its biblical teachings.

Theme three: A written policy is unnecessary. Between 70 and 80 percent of schools in this study's sample did not have an official admission policy for potential students from one or more of the target groups under study. Though the research survey did not explicitly ask the reasons for a school to choose not to have a policy, the open-ended comments shed some light on the idea that Christian schools had not addressed the realities of the socio-political climate in the

areas of sexual orientation and gender identity. Responses indicated that many Christian school administrators did not believe they would have to confront a controversial admission decision because “they [a homosexual couple] would not want to be in a Christian school.”

Ignoring the question of how to handle applications from children of same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students was not exclusive to schools who do not or are unlikely to accept those types of students. At the other end of the spectrum, administrators from private secular schools indicated that their practice of not discriminating on the basis of sexual orientation or gender identity made a written policy unnecessary. Therefore, schools that pride themselves on being open and non-discriminatory also failed to explicitly state their admission policies. In both instances, the schools’ practices were not borne from a written policy and thus, left schools vulnerable to challenges.

When asked if a visitor to the school’s website could readily discern the school’s admission policy for same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students, some respondents’ comments supported the premise that religious-based schools feel somewhat protected from having to make admission decisions regarding children with same-sex parents or homosexual and transgender children because of their religious beliefs. Survey respondents from several schools identified their statement of faith as preventing students from applying to the school. One Catholic respondent wrote that a person who looked at websites would probably “not look at us because we’re Catholic.”

Theme four: Learning about a student after admission. Some administrators ($n = 9$) from schools with and without admission policies that addressed same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students suggested they were confronted with those concerns after a student had already been admitted. Sometimes the marital status of the parents changed: “We have had

students with divorced parents, one of which [sic] then entered into a same-sex ‘marriage.’” In addition, students might “come out” as gay or lesbian after admission and enrollment: “We have students who have identified as homosexual after being admitted.” Some respondents ($n = 4$) noted that former students had “transitioned after graduating;” and that other students “did not come out until after they graduated.”

Theme five: Anticipating changes in the law. The survey asked respondents whether their current admission policy was a response to an admission decision regarding same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. Several respondents provided optional comments that indicated that their school saw a need for a policy addressing admission of these types of students before the school was confronted with the need to make a decision. Comments from schools with clear policies included such statements as:

“We were on the front end of putting things together in anticipation of these challenges.”

“We are intentional about being proactive and not reactive. We create these policies before the issue arises to the best of our ability.”

“We saw this coming...”

One respondent noted that the school’s admission policy had been established ten years previously but had recently been strengthened. He or she said that the school had “consulted with legal parties to have an acceptable admission policy...in [response] to the homosexual admission cases that were appearing around the country.”

Interview Results

The purpose of the interview component (Appendix B) of this exploratory study was to determine the perspectives of a sample ($n = 5$) of private religious school administrators regarding their schools’ policies related to the admission of students from same-sex families and

homosexual or transgender students. Two of the interviewees (Subject 4 and Subject 5) were acquainted with the researcher and invited to participate in the interview. Two interviewees volunteered to participate via a link on the thank-you page of the survey, and one interview participant, an international school administrator, asked to participate in the interview via email upon reading about this research project in an on-line forum. The results of each interview are presented in this section, followed by the common themes that emerged from the full collection of interview responses.

Demographic Results

Table 7 identifies the demographic distribution of interview subjects.

Table 7

Interview Participants' Demographic Information (n = 5)

ID	Interview Type	Gender	Title	School Type	School Size	Grades Served	Geographic Region
S1	In person	M	Founder, Head of School	Non-denominational Classical Christian	350	K-12	SW
S2	Email	F	Director	International Christian	300	K-12	Intl.
S3	Phone	M	Director	Non-denominational Christian	150	PreK - 8	SW
S4	Phone	F	Director	Independent Christian	400	K-8	SE
S5	In person	F	Founder Director	Non-denominational Classical Christian	75	PreK-5	SW

Note. M and F refer to Male and Female gender respectively. K indicates that a school serves students in kindergarten. PreK indicates that a school serves students younger than kindergarten. SW and SE refer to the Southwest and Southeast regions of the United States. Intl. refers to International.

Individual Interview Responses

Interview #1. Participant S1 was interviewed in his office on the campus of his high school. The school has been in existence for approximately 15 years and was founded by the participant. Located in the southwest, the school serves students in kindergarten through grade 12 from two locations. The school owns the building that houses its high school and rents classroom space for younger students from a nearby church.

When the school was in its third or fourth year, S1 was faced with an admission decision regarding an elementary-age child with divorced parents—one of whom identified as homosexual. The heterosexual parent wanted to enroll the child in S1’s school. Describing the sentiment of the administration at the time, S1 said, “There was a kind of understanding that we needed to think more deeply about the child and what their [*sic*] needs were.” After seeking legal and spiritual counsel, S1 and a committee of decision-makers concluded that the key goal for the success of the child and the maintenance of school values was “to build a trusting relationship of common faith and common value with moms and dads.” In the end, the administrator determined that a relationship would not be possible with the family and, subsequently, the student was not invited to enroll at the school.

When faced with the challenge of admitting applicants from same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students, S1 advised,

When we talk about this issue, I think it’s best to separate it into two categories. One is the legal liability standpoint...and the other side is related to the compassion we need to have for young people growing up with these ideologies floating around.

From the legal standpoint, S1 advised that schools needed to have specific admission policies to address sexuality issues. He warned, however, “if all we do is talk about the legal protections and...never get to the second part [compassion], then I think it’s a big mistake.”

Christian schools, in general, should make a point of addressing all sexual sin. S1’s recurrent warning was to not “over-specialize” the sin of homosexuality or gender dysphoria in school policies. He said, “I need to develop policies for children who are heterosexual and sleeping with their girlfriend or boyfriend. I also have to develop policies around children who are engaging in homosexual behavior.” S1 advocated for an institutional statement of human sexuality that reads, “Biblical sexuality happens in the context of a committed relationship between a man and a woman in a marriage covenant.” He noted that Christian schools need to address sexual sin without over-specializing it.

Taking steps toward greater compassion for all students struggling with their identities, S1 suggested that rather than directly address an individual’s identity as a reflection of same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria, “[we] address the identity that is true of the spirit of the person.” Addressing one’s identity is best done, he opined, at the upper school level by talking to students about their identity in Christ. He said,

Instead of trying to address whether it be same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria...talk about the fact that we all have to bring our attractions, our desires, our identity confusions—whether it is gender identity, the identity of being a jock, or the identity of being a straight-A student—we have to bring those things to the cross and say, Father, how would you show me who I am?

S1’s over-arching word of advice to other educators in the area of admission policies is that “it is always about fit.” Crediting a friend of his, he commented that when it came to

inviting any family into the school, “we’re going to have a mutually beneficial relationship. We’re [the school] going to benefit you and we want you to benefit us.” S1 expounded upon this statement by saying, “If, at some point, that [benefit] ceases to be the case—on either party’s end—then we don’t have business trying to work at something that’s so important and so monumental in a child’s life.”

Interview #2. A school board member for the school represented by S2 saw a posting about the current research study on a professional message board and passed the information to the director of a private international Christian school in the European country where she is serving as a missionary. The director, S2, preferred to answer the interview questions via email. The interview guide (Appendix B) was emailed to her, along with the appropriate consent form, and she returned both to the researcher with her responses. Although this research study was directed toward schools in the United States, the researcher believed that the international school would add some valuable insights to the current study. The international school is an English-speaking school and the vast majority of the school board members are American. S2 said, “We are a school, but we are also a ministry.”

S2 serves as director of the international school with approximately 300 students in kindergarten through grade 12. Students come from more than 60 countries and have varying degrees of English language proficiency. Although a Christian school, the school maintains an open enrollment policy. S2 explained that her school accepted students from vastly different backgrounds. She expounded by saying, “If we know they [applicants] are not a Christian family, then we make sure they understand that we will teach their children from a biblical worldview. If they are okay with it, then we accept the children.” She is uncertain whether there

are children in the school with same-sex parents or children who claim to be homosexual, transgender or who struggle with gender identity.

The admission policy of S2's school addresses the fact that the school teaches a biblical worldview and that parents should be aware of that fact even if they do not share the same beliefs. However, this policy is only addressed when parents apply to the school. S2 acknowledged that the growing moral and social issues surrounding human sexuality gave her cause for concern. She wrote, "We are in the process of adding more guidelines to our employee handbook about this issue [homosexuality and gender identity]. We plan to add a statement about God's creation of male and female and another about marriage." S2 clarified that the addition of such statements to the handbook was primarily to ensure that the school employed faculty and staff who were fully supportive of the school's beliefs, rather than for the benefit of current and potential families and students.

Currently, the primary impetus for acceptance at S2's school is based on whether or not the school can meet the needs of the child. The interviewee stated that the school rarely turns away an applicant. Only when the school does not have an opening for an English language learner or when a class size becomes too large, would a student not be accepted. S2 added that the family must "understand our stance on teaching a biblical worldview and that Bible class and chapel are mandatory, and they agree to it."

When asked how she would advise another Christian school that faced the decision to admit a student from a same-sex family, a homosexual student, or a transgender student, she said, "Accept them and love them." In her school, parents must agree to abide by the school's rules and accept that the student will be taught from a biblical worldview. With those understandings in place, S2 did not see a problem with the school's accepting a student. She did

encourage other schools to “ask the Holy Spirit to give wisdom in determining if they [potential families and students] are trying to...bring awareness to a different agenda.”

Similar to participant S1, participant S2 agreed that if the decision-makers had any concerns about the potential student or family and their ability to support the school and its policies, “a discussion would need to take place about whether the school is a good fit for them [the students and families].”

Interview #3. Interview subject S3 is the director of a small, Christian school in the Southwestern region of the US with approximately 150 students in pre-kindergarten through 8th grade. S3 and his wife own the school, having purchased it from the founder, and S3 has been the director for approximately 20 years.

S3’s school has a firm policy not to accept any child from a same-sex home or who has homosexual or transgender individuals within the family. S3 stated that during the interview process, “We ask them point blank if anybody in their family is transgender [*sic*] or living a homosexual lifestyle...either parents or grandparents.” The policy, however, is not posted on the website. S3 stated that the lack of a posted policy was intentional. The policy does not appear in the school handbook or on any school paperwork. When asked about the rationale behind that choice, S3 stated,

We made the conscientious decision not to put it [the policy] there because we didn’t want to attract radical LGBTQ people to us who would try to get into our school, make it clear they were LGBTQ, and then try to sue us because they got somebody to give them \$20,000 to sue us...to make us look bad...to rake us over the coals...and to hurt us.

During his tenure as Director, S3 recalled only one incident in which his school made an admission decision regarding a child whose parents were allegedly lesbian. He admitted that he

did not exactly know the relationship between the two women in the home, but the application for admission referred to each woman as the child's mother. S3 said, "I determined that they must be a lesbian couple that had this child. One was the biological mom and the other was not." Since the largest piece of the admission process at his school is a 20-minute interview with the parents, he chose to interview the couple. The interview was conducted by phone. S3 reported, "From that [the interview], we were able to determine...though they didn't come right out and say it...that they were a lesbian couple." Ultimately, S3 called the family and told them that it did not appear to him that they shared the values of the school. He reported his telling one of the women, "You're going to make it very difficult for me to explain to the children in your child's grade why he has two mommies." S3 said the woman understood his position and that there had been no backlash to the decision.

The reference to shared values was repeated by S3 several times as the primary factor in the school's deciding whether or not to offer admission to an applicant. He reported that the school's belief statement is posted on the website and that several years ago the school added the definition of biblical marriage. Nonetheless, S3 clarified,

I don't require our families to be Christian. So even if—and perhaps this is a fine point—a Buddhist family comes to us and they want their child to be moral and do what's right...and they recognize the values that we hold...that morality is right and good...even though they don't honor Christ or the scriptures, that Buddhist family would be accepted over a family that says they are Christian but live a homosexual lifestyle.

When considering a child for admission, S3 noted that the decision must result in a relationship that is mutually beneficial for the parent, child, and the school. "It has to be something the Holy Spirit is leading us to do...and where we can see, on a moral basis, we can

work together with the parent.” S3 explained that people who are living a homosexual lifestyle do not share the same moral values as the school and, consequently, “would not be a good fit” for the school.

When asked how he would advise a school that faced the question of admission of a child from a same-sex home or a homosexual or transgender child, S3 encouraged the persons who were responsible for the decision to “be up front about it.” S3 advises administrators to “frame the conversation in the truth and explain that this is not a good fit for you or for our school and here are the reasons....”

Interview #4. Participant S4 is in her ninth year as the director of a highly acclaimed private Christian and independent school in the southeast region of the US. The school has been operating for almost 25 years and currently serves approximately 400 students in kindergarten through 8th grade.

All families interested in the school are encouraged to apply, and S4 believes there is at least one child in the school with same-sex parents. The school does not have an official policy regarding the admission of children from same-sex homes or for homosexual or transgender students. Admission to the school, however, is somewhat selective and based primarily on students’ academic potential or achievement. Once an application is received, a family is invited to take a school tour; children in 1st through 8th grades undergo a one-on-one, school-designed assessment that takes approximately two hours. Kindergarten students undergo a similar, age-appropriate screening assessment. Additionally, transfer students in 6th through 8th grades are required to have at least one recommendation from their previous school. Kindergartners must have a pre-school recommendation. The potential student’s only interview involves the informal interactions between the evaluator and the student during the one-on-one assessment.

Occasionally, S4 meets with a 7th or 8th grade student and his or her parents to “talk about the social milieu [of the school] and about the expectations we have.”

During the school tours, S4 noted that potential families are informed of the school’s biblical worldview and are told that biblical teaching is integrated throughout the program. If a family is forthcoming about a same-sex relationship or the child self-reports homosexual or transgender identity, S4 commented that the school would “just be very clear” about what is taught and suggest to the family that they “might be uncomfortable with that.” When asked what she would do if the same-sex family stated that they would be fine with biblical teaching, S4 was not certain how she would respond. Although her school functions as an independent school with an independent (non-denominational) board, it is also affiliated with a church. “We are a ministry of the [denomination] which, you may know, is having this conversation right now—about marrying [same-sex] couples and/or placing homosexual pastors in the pulpit. So, it’s a sensitive issue.” Although the church is not involved in the school’s admission decisions, S4 believed that before making a decision for the school regarding admission of homosexual or transgender students or students from same-sex families, she would “at least run it by the pastor [of the church].” She added that she did not know what he would say.

While S4’s school does not have a policy in place regarding the admission of students from same-sex families or students who are pursuing a homosexual or transgender lifestyle, she believes that there may be a need to develop such a policy if her federal funding or state scholarships would be in jeopardy. Her recommendation to schools that face challenging admission decisions included the advice to talk to families about “what the school believes and what the Bible says. Stick to what you believe, not what you’re against.”

Interview #5. The classical Christian school founded two years ago by participant S5, the current administrator, is located in a large city in the southwest. She described her school as “unique because we have a daycare.” The school currently serves 76 children from the age of 12 months through 5th grade. The goal of the school, however, “is to add a grade, Lord willing, every year until we get through high school.” This year about half of S5’s students were in grammar school and the rest were in day care.

When S5 opened her school in 2016, she was initially concerned about sexuality issues because Christian businesses and organizations in her city were being challenged by members of the LGBTQ community in the arena of public opinion. S5 did not, however, establish an official policy for admission. Her school’s printed documents and website contain a statement of faith which included a clause which states, “Marriage is between one man and one woman.” Currently, applicants who seek admission to the school must sign a document stating that they agree with the tenets of the statement of faith.

S5 reported that most of the applicants have found the school on its website. If parents want to begin the process of admission, they must follow the application protocol that includes filling out an application with several additional documents, coming in for a tour, and then participating in a family interview. During the interview, S5 reviews the statement of faith with the prospective family and then “we ask tough questions to make sure they aren’t going to be at home promoting things that are counter to the biblical principles we are teaching them [the students] at school.” She admitted that she raises sexuality issues in the interview saying, “The Bible calls it [homosexuality] a sin...It’s not a gray area. We would not be teaching that it is moral...or something we approve of.” Though her school had never received an application from a same-sex family or a gay or transgender student at the time of the interview, S5 had

interviewed two families who decided not to enroll because they thought that the school's instructional content was "too strict," and they did not want their children to "be taught intolerance and hatred."

S5 reported that she expected the marriage clause of the school's statement of faith to be strengthened in the future and to become part of the admission policy. While her conviction is that children with same-sex parents are automatically disqualified from admission to the school, she noted that she would consider accepting a child who is questioning his or her sexuality or sexual identity. S5 labeled this position as "a no-brainer." Her rationale for this decision was that "Parents are adults. They've made their choices and, consequently, the school would not be able to enter into a mutually beneficial relationship with parents who were living a lifestyle opposed to the school's marriage statement." S5 said that if students knew that they would be taught the Bible at school and were "open to the truth and open to prayer and counsel and being witnessed and ministered to," then she would continue to speak truth into their lives until the point at which students began speaking out against the biblical teaching or stopped receiving the counsel given by the school.

At the conclusion of the interview, S5 admitted that speaking in the hypothetical is easy when making an admission decision but having never been confronted with applications from same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students, the decision would be more challenging if someone were sitting in her office. She realized that the school needed a clear policy in "black and white [regarding] what we will accept and what we will not accept."

Emergent Themes

Seven dominant themes emerged from the researcher's analysis of the coded interview data across the five administrators of Christian schools.

Theme 1: One policy is not enough. Four of the five interview participants expressed the view that children with same-sex parents could not be viewed the same way that gay, lesbian, or transgender children are viewed. Though S2 and S4's schools had what amounted to open-enrollment policies, they agreed that working with same-sex parents would be a challenge. The other three interviewees were clear that their schools typically entered into critical relationships with the parents and that they could not do so with same-sex parents because the parents were already living contrary to the values of the school. Four schools had a definition of marriage and/or a statement on human sexuality as part of the school's larger statement of faith or other school policy.

Although three administrators of the schools said they would not accept students with same-sex parents, two said they were open to the possibility of accepting homosexual students with the caveat that the students were aware of the school's teachings and that the students would be open to appropriate biblical counseling. Participant S1 warned not to "over-specialize" homosexuality but to treat it as any other sin. All five participants were clear that homosexual students must not act upon their same-sex attractions, nor promote homosexual behavior as a positive lifestyle choice. The consequence of students' active promotion of the homosexual lifestyle was dismissal from the school. While none of the schools had a policy regarding the admission of homosexual students, they had policies regarding the sexual conduct of all students. As participant S3 stated, "We have a policy that says you can't brag about sin."

Theme 2: Gender dysphoria as a fad. None of the five interview participants had a clear vision for handling transgender students, and none of the administrators had a written admission policy in place for these types of students. Several participants commented that transgenderism may be the latest fad among middle school students. Participant S1 remarked:

It's popular now, in middle school, to decide you're transgender. Like it was popular to wear black when I was going to school. Now, it's popular to decide that you're not sure about your gender and, in fact, the studies I've been looking at most recently [report] that the biggest indicating factor of a child coming to conclude they're transgender is that they have a friend, or someone close to them that is concluding the same thing.

So, it's spreading more like a popular fad than anything else.

Participant S4 agreed that "it [transgenderism] has become in vogue. It's become a way for kids to identify, and they think it's kind of cool."

S4 commented that, earlier in her career, she had encountered a gender-dysphoric 4th grader in a public school but had not seen transgender students in her private school. She did note that a transgender child attended the youth group at her church. She called the spread of gender dysphoria among middle school students "troubling," because "their formal operational thought is not well developed; their brains aren't well developed. They're trying to figure out who they are, and they sort of latch onto something like this."

Theme 3: A good fit. At some point during the interviews, three participants used the phrase, "a good fit." Participant S1 said "fit" was the most important thing they looked for in a student. When asked to define the meaning of "fit," he said, "It means we are spiritually on the same page in the sense that this is a family that is going to be supporting the values of scripture...." For S1, a good fit was found in shared values.

Participant S2, whose school has an open enrollment policy said, "If you sense that they [the parents] cannot support the school with its policies, then a discussion would need to take place about whether the school is a good fit." She went on to say that if parents will just "put up

with the school's views because they want their child raised with certain values," then she would be able to work with them and still consider them a good fit.

When discussing the situation of a same-sex couple's application to his school, S3 said that if parents or grandparents are living in adultery, have a homosexual lifestyle, or are in a gay or lesbian marriage, he would tell them, "I don't really think we share your values, and you don't share the values that are foundational to our school. It's going to cause a problem, so I don't think we're a good fit for each other."

Theme 4: Framing the rejection. Four of the participants spoke of their concerns about the rejection of a student's application because their parents were in a homosexual marriage, or of rejecting students who had decided they were homosexual or wanted to be a different gender. Interviewees' concerns ranged from fear of legal ramifications to an expressed desire to show compassion for children who struggle with their sexual identity. While none of the participants exhibited hostility toward the groups under study, the school administrators recognized that the current socio-political climate left them vulnerable to legal challenges if they deny admission to children based on their sexuality or the sexuality of their parents. S1 discussed both the legality of denying admission and the desire to show compassion as separate concerns that need intentional consideration. He described two conversations he had in the past five or six years with parents "who agree with the biblical stance but are concerned with how we're stating it to make sure that we're developing compassion for the students as they deal with those things [sexuality]." He warned against having "merely a legal protection attitude about these [sexual orientation and gender identity] issues."

Participant S3 said that even if he kindly explained that his school's teachings would not be compatible with the child's life experience, "I could get sued, and it could get messy." He did

express doubt that he would lose such a case, but “it might have to go to a higher court or something.”

Unlike Participants S1 and S3, Participant S4 accepted some types of government funding and expressed concern that, at some point, she could be forced to take students who were not willing to comply with the biblical teachings of the school, or she could face losing some of her funding. Currently her school has no admission policy beyond meeting the academic admission standard and is, therefore, considered an open enrollment school. S4’s position on whether or not to deny admission to a student is to “stick to what the Bible says, and what the school believes” and hopefully the students and parents will make their own choices and decide whether or not to send their children to the school.

Participant S5 shared the concerns about balancing the legalities and compassion described by Participant S1 but currently employs a technique similar to that of S4 in hoping that a family will remove itself from consideration. She found that by using the school’s statement of faith as an interview guide, she could “ask the tough questions,” and then “they [the parents] have to sign that they are in agreement with all aspects of our statement of faith.”

Theme 5: Honesty is the best policy. Only one of the participants reported that the school should be careful about its written admission policy and the ways that the policy is published. He preferred to deal with issues one-on-one as they arose. His belief was that the socio-political climate around the LGBTQ movement left him vulnerable; therefore, he intentionally chose not to publish an official policy regarding the admission of children from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. He also chose not to publish an admission policy regarding the faith or belief system of potential students.

The other four interviewees stated that administrators should be clear about the school's beliefs on all matters, as well as the school's academic instruction. S1 discussed a hypothetical applicant who held beliefs contrary to the school's beliefs when he said,

I would be honest and say, just as I would want someone to tell me what they're going to teach my children, I'm going to tell you what I'm going to teach your children. I don't know if that would be in line with what you would want us to teach your children and if it isn't, then I assume we can't work together well.

Additionally, he said that the school's Marriage and Human Sexuality statement makes the school's stand crystal clear. The policy is published in multiple places in the school's literature and on the school's website.

Participant S2, an administrator of a Christian school with an open enrollment policy, said, "We make sure they [the parents] understand that we will teach their children from a biblical worldview...There must be an understanding of who we are as a school and what we believe." This sentiment was echoed by S4: "We talk about our biblical worldview...we just make it very clear." S5 noted that as part of the application process, "parents acknowledge that we are a Christian school, and our beliefs can't be contradicted at home."

Theme 6: Legal concerns. Three participants (S1, S4, S5) expressed concern over increased legal challenges to Christian businesses in the US and the negative publicity of many Catholic and Christian schools around the country. Each of the three participants disclosed that they had sought legal counsel in order to be prepared against a potential legal challenge to a denied admission. Participant S3 did not think a legal challenge was out of the realm of possibility, but he had never sought legal counsel for admission concerns at his school. He felt

confident he would ultimately prevail against a legal challenge, though he admitted it could take a lot of time and resources.

Theme 7: An outlook on the future. Each of the five interviewees expressed concerns that the socio-political pressures surrounding LGBTQ matters were only going to become more prevalent and would eventually reach into Christian schools. While each of the administrators viewed the root of the potential problems differently, all five of the school leaders reported that they were in the process of making policy changes or acknowledged that policy changes were needed and should be completed sooner rather than later.

S1 referred to increased differences within the Christian community as mainline denominational churches accept homosexual couples into membership and homosexual pastors in the pulpit. He said, “We are seeing large portions of the church compromising the biblical text in various ways in the mainline denominations.” He warned that churches should get ready “for the lies of the sexual revolution to be broken.” He expressed a belief that Christian schools are going to increasingly face these types of admission decisions and, for the time being, believes his school is positioned fairly well to face them.

Because of her school’s open enrollment policy, S2 did not anticipate any changes in the future with the admission of students. S2 was more concerned about the school’s future in terms of her school’s ability to hire like-minded teachers aligned to the school’s biblical worldview. She stated that the school is currently “adding more [human sexuality and lifestyle] guidelines to the handbook, including statements about God’s creation of male and female and another about marriage.” The school is taking this stance “in order to employ faculty and staff that [sic] support the school’s beliefs.” She also noted that the policy changes are not meant for the current families or potential new families of the school.

S3 remarked that the future portends increasing intolerance for points of view that are contrary to a homosexual lifestyle. “I do think that it [LGBTQ agenda] is going to become a bigger problem. They’re [educators] teaching LGBTQ values earlier...and brainwashing them [students] into thinking it’s fine.” He expected to see an increase in the number of people who, though they have never engaged in homosexuality, say “I don’t think I’m going to put my child in your school because I don’t want him thinking that it [homosexuality] is not a good choice or alternative lifestyle for some people.” He said the increasing tolerance of homosexual behavior by Christians “is going to be more of a problem as the years go by.”

S4 expressed a sense of being “in limbo” as she waited for her denomination to make decisions about the direction they were headed regarding homosexual and transgender concerns. Though her school currently does not have a specific policy on human sexuality, S4 said, “It will be coming to the forefront soon,” and she believed the school would eventually have to create a written policy about handling these types of admission decisions.

S5 spoke of the future saying, “It [same-sex family application] hasn’t happened yet, but it’s going to come; ...with growth comes these kinds of issues that are sensitive or could be lawsuits and all because of one family.” She said she planned to “tighten” her statement of faith and put the statement of biblical marriage into a written admission policy.

Summary

Chapter four presented the quantitative and qualitative results of an online survey and the qualitative results of the subsequent semi-structured interviews. Chapter five includes the results as they address the study’s research questions, discusses the implications of the study for private school policy questions, and offers recommendations for future research.

V. DISCUSSION

The purpose of this exploratory study was to determine whether private religious and secular schools have codified policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. A second purpose was to identify the principles that guide admission policy decisions and the influence of those decisions on private schools and their stakeholders.

During the 2017-2018 academic year, 78% ($n = 3,821,560$) of all private-school students in the United States were enrolled in a private school that reported a religious affiliation (Broughman et al., 2019). When the Supreme Court of the United States ruled in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) that same-sex marriage was a fundamental right guaranteed by the Fourteenth Amendment, many private Christian schools came under public scrutiny for denying admission to children with same-sex parents. Although religious schools have a constitutional right to exclude students on the basis of religion and to establish biblical lifestyle requirements as enrollment criteria, many have failed to clearly articulate an admission policy and the underlying biblical principle for it.

The evolutionary theory of social change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Gage, 2017; Kezar, 2001) provided the theoretical rationale for the study, as well as research describing organizational responses to the influence of external socio-political factors upon organizational change. The intent of the study was to learn more about the ways that private schools have

responded to the socio-political pressure and cultural changes brought about by the Supreme Court's decision in *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) and the *Dear Colleague* letter (Llahmon & Gupta, 2016) written to public schools. Utilizing an online survey and semi-structured interviews, the researcher examined the admission policies, decision-making processes, and the philosophies that undergirded admission decisions of private schools in the United States.

The following questions were addressed in this exploratory research study:

Q1: Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?

Q2: Have private schools re-examined or changed their admission policies to address admission of students with same-sex parents and students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

Q3: What factors influence the admission policies of private schools with regard to admission of students who have same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

Q4: How do admission policies related to students from same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students shape a private school's culture and, subsequently, the views of stakeholders?

Of the 101 respondents to the online survey, 80 met the criteria for participation in the study. The respondents were decision-makers in the area of admissions at their respective schools and represented either a private secular ($n = 19$) or faith-based ($n = 61$) school. In addition to the online survey, five respondents volunteered to participate in a semi-structured interview about their schools' admission policies. All five interviewees were administrators at private Christian schools.

Frequencies and percentages described the responses to demographic and binary-choice survey items, while means and standard deviations were reported for Likert-scaled items. Free-

response items and comments were compiled and reported qualitatively as emergent themes.

Analysis of the interview data included coding, identification of individual themes, and themes common to the set of interview subjects.

This chapter discusses the conclusions of the study as they relate to the research questions and offers implications for schools and suggestions for future research.

Conclusions by Research Question

The evolutionary theory of organizational change provided an appropriate foundation for shaping the research questions of this exploratory study of private school admission policies. Schools are social institutions that reflect the larger society (Crossman, 2019; McMahon, 2018); therefore, research questions were aimed at understanding ways that the socio-political changes to the definition of marriage and the acceptance of gay, lesbian, and transgender youth have influenced admission policies of private schools. Utilizing the major assumptions of Kezar's (2001) model of evolutionary change, the research addressed responses to the cultural shifts and political changes to the definition of marriage and human sexuality as they trickle down into private school admission policies.

Question One: Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?

Across all demographic identifiers, approximately 73% of all respondents from both secular and Christian private schools reported having no admission policy that addressed students from same-sex parents or students who identified as gay, lesbian, or transgender. This conclusion supports Coley's (2012) research on Christian school admission policies for children with same-sex parents; Coley (2012) reported that 75% of survey respondents ($n = 66$) did not have a policy and noted that this finding was "a major concern" (p. 32). Similar results of this

current study revealed that little has changed since 2012 in terms of Christian schools' articulation of clear admission policies related to this particular social phenomenon.

Schools with admission policies that directly addressed admission of gay or transgender students fell into two groups: those with a written policy of non-discrimination and those who followed a written set of guiding principles. A typical statement of non-discrimination as reported by respondents from non-religious schools stated that

[Name of school] does not discriminate on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, gender identity, age, national and/or ethnic origin, disability, sexual orientation or other basis prohibited by law in administration of our educational policies, admission policies, scholarship and loan programs, and athletic and other school-administered programs.

Respondents from some Christian and Catholic schools also provided statements of non-discrimination, but they did not include the words "religion," "gender identity," or "sexual orientation."

Survey respondents who cited guiding precepts and principles as policy reported several means by which to address same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and gender identity. A typical example of a guiding principle read:

In the spirit of truth and love, the school affirms that God has designed marriage as the solemn union of one man and one woman and that the beauty of sexual intimacy and the blessing of the living together are designed to be exclusive to that union.

A more complex statement, a variation of which was reported by several schools, stated:

We believe every person must be afforded compassion, love, kindness, respect and dignity. Hateful and harassing behavior or attitudes directed toward any individual are to be repudiated and are not in accord with scripture nor the doctrines of the church. We

believe that each person's God given sex is determined biologically at birth. We believe the term "marriage" as sanctioned by God in scripture joins one man and one woman in an exclusive union. We believe sexual intimacy to only occur between a man and a woman who are married to each other. We believe God has commanded that no intimate sexual activity be engaged in outside of a marriage between a man and woman. We believe any form of sexual immorality, including but not limited to adultery, fornication, homosexual conduct, bisexual conduct, bestiality, use of pornography, any attempt to change one's biological sex or identity as anything other than one's biological sex or to express disagreement with one's biological sex, is sinful and contrary to God's Word.

Two survey respondents directly tied statements of marriage and sexuality to admission policies by a written statement that the school did not admit students whose parents were living a lifestyle contrary to the school's beliefs or that the school reserved the right not to admit students who professed any other point of view.

Respondents described their admission guidelines and beliefs about biblical marriage, homosexuality, and gender identity using various titles; in addition, guidelines were typically published in a variety of school documents, such as a student and family handbook, employment applications, and codes of conduct. Only one survey respondent reported that his school put a human sexuality statement in the application packet.

Christian school administrators who participated in an interview described their admission practices concerning applicants with same-sex parents and homosexual or transgender students in a variety of ways. S1 reported that his school's policy was articulated during the interview process. S3 said parents were "vetted" through a 20-minute interview that included questions about the parents' and grandparent's relationships. "When same sex couples apply, we

find out their views during the interview and advise them that their views are not compatible with our beliefs at our Christian school. Therefore, we do not accept them.”

When survey respondents were asked if visitors to their website could readily discern their school’s admission policy with regards to same-sex parents and homosexual or transgender students, 61% responded “no.” The respondents added a plethora of optional comments to explain the disconnect between their admission policies and the information presented on their websites. Comments included:

“None of our admission policies are on our website.”

“Not from the admission policy but certainly from the rest of the website.”

“We do make it clear in our statement of faith that we believe in biblical marriage between one man and one woman.”

“They would have to do some searching.”

“I am not sure. We define marriage as between one man and one woman at one time. Following that, we define gender as ‘biologically assigned at birth.’”

“[People] probably would not look at us because we’re Catholic.”

“This [question] assumes a lot of things about a visitor. Is the information there? Yes”

“No. And that is by design.”

“After taking this survey, I think it is probably something we should add.”

The comments, taken as a whole, led the researcher to conclude that school leaders are comfortable with making absolute statements based on scripture, but uncomfortable with making an absolute policy statement regarding the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students, even when those policies are founded upon scripture.

In the seven years since Coley's (2012) foundational research, new sexual orientation and gender identity laws (SOGI's) have led to a societal shift that promotes sexual autonomy over religious freedom (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). Christian bakers, photographers, florists, adoption agencies, schools, and small businesses have been drawn into legal battles on the grounds that they are violating any number of SOGI's. The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF) recommends that Christian schools, churches, and other ministries publish their statements of faith and other documents. A written statement of faith may not dissuade SOGI advocates from bringing an "easy lawsuit" (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018, p. 4), but it will provide a strong First Amendment defense if challenged in court. Many respondents to the survey, as well as the interviewees, pointed to a statement of faith that included sections on human sexuality. While these statements may be published in some school documents, the application and admission process are a family's first introduction to a school. If an admission policy is not in place that clearly links acceptance or denial of admission to the statement of faith, a school could become vulnerable to legal challenges.

Coley (2012) found that 75% of the Christian schools participating in his study did not have an admission policy for children of same-sex parents. At the time of Coley's (2012) research, the question of student homosexuality and transgenderism was not part of the discussion. Data from this current research study indicated that almost 73% of private Christian school respondents stated that their school did not have a codified admission policy related to the specific groups addressed in the study. Given the litigious nature of society and the increase in SOGI's across the country, this researcher agrees with Coley's (2012) conclusion that the lack of a written admission policy that is readily available to applicants and decision-makers remains a point of concern.

Question Two: Have private schools re-examined or changed their admission policies to address admission of students with same-sex parents and students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

The evolutionary model of change primarily describes ways that organizations react to external influences and pressures (Gleeson, 2019). Kezar's (2001) model asserted that organizations tend to react to changes in the external environment by managing them, rather than by planning for them (Baker & Baldwin, 2014).

In the current study, survey and interview participants indicated several different types of responses to the legalization of same-sex marriage, Title IX changes to accommodate transgender students, and the advancement of LGBTQ rights. Survey and interview responses from school leaders who had made first-order changes (Kezar, 2001) such as minor adjustments or improvements to their school's policies revealed responses on a spectrum from reactionary to proactive. One hundred percent of the survey respondents from non-religious schools ($n = 19$) noted that homosexuality and gender identity were a non-issue when considering an application for admission. Those respondents indicated that no changes to policy were needed or had been made to respond to same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender children. On the other end of the spectrum, one Catholic school respondent reported that the school considered LGBTQ matters contrary to Catholic teachings and created a policy stating, "Students' lifestyle choices may not contradict the teachings of the Catholic Church in all areas; therefore, any student who openly [promotes] either homosexual activity... or preference is unable to continue enrollment."

Two survey respondents from faith-based schools reported admission policy changes as a reaction to questions regarding the admission of homosexual students. The first respondent admitted that the school's stakeholders discussed the matter for the first time after receiving an

application from a same-sex couple. The second respondent noted that his school's policy, though established circa 2009, was strengthened after consulting legal counsel in reaction to the homosexual admissions cases that were appearing across the nation.

Other comments from respondents pointed to foresight in creating their current admission policies. Comments included, "We were on the front end of putting things together in anticipation of challenges," and "We are intentional about being proactive and not reactive. We create these policies before the issue arises to the best of our ability."

Several survey respondents noted that their schools had not yet established an admission policy regarding the target groups but that the conversations were taking place. Two survey respondents who reported that their schools did not have a specific admission policy indicated that they did not expect to have one because they did not believe they would ever need to make that type of decision. In other words, the respondents did not think that same-sex couples, or homosexual and transgender students, would apply to their schools. Given the rapidly changing social landscape regarding sexual orientation and gender identity and challenges to religious beliefs (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018), the data in this current study indicated that private faith-based schools are probably not prepared for nor planning for the influence and pressures of the external socio-political environment on their organizations.

This researcher suspects that many of the schools' official statements on marriage and human sexuality included in the survey responses were not originally part of the schools' fundamental documents but were added either proactively or reactively. This researcher's impression was supported by interview participants S1 and S5. Interviewee S1 stated that his school's statement on human sexuality was created when he "walked into the issue [an application from homosexual parents] in year 3 or 4 [of the school's existence]. Although S1's

policy change came as a reactive response, it brought sexual orientation concerns to the forefront, and his school has been able to plan and develop a policy that is clear to applicants and school stakeholders. Interviewee S5 admitted that participation in this exploratory study exposed her vulnerability to litigation. She noted that she would be taking proactive steps to revise her admission policy. Addressing homosexuality and transgenderism concerns before challenges to mission-critical beliefs and practices should prevent schools from putting their time and resources at risk.

Question Three: What factors influence the admission policies of private schools with regard to admission of students who have same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

One criticism of the evolutionary model of social change is its alleged tendency to minimize the influence of internal factors upon change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014). The current study asked survey respondents to address some of the internal factors in their schools and the influence of those factors on admission decisions. Respondents were asked to comment on the importance of the school's mission; the school's culture; the attitudes of faculty, staff, and current families toward same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism; and philosophical precepts of biblical or church doctrine. Respondents were invited to elaborate upon each survey item or to indicate other important factors the stakeholders in their schools might consider when making admission decisions.

Across the spectrum of all school types, sizes, and locations in this study, respondents to this survey item reported that their school's mission and culture were the most important factors when making admission decisions. School mission was cited by 74% of all respondents ($n = 68$) as "important" or "very important." Respondents from Christian non-denominational and

church-affiliated schools rated school mission (65%) and school culture (70%) as “very important.” Sixty percent of the same Christian school respondents rated biblical teaching and/or church doctrine as very important. The data from non-religious schools yielded similar results regarding the importance of school mission and culture. In addition, 100% of the non-religious schools’ leaders rated biblical teaching as “not important.”

Although same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism are contrary to Catholic teaching, respondents from 14 of 15 Catholic schools in this sample reported that they admitted students from the groups under study; 80% of respondents from Catholic schools cited biblical teaching/church doctrine as either “important” or “very important” when making admission decisions.

This researcher was surprised that, based on their responses to the survey, many school leaders appeared unconcerned about considering the attitudes of their faculty toward the issues of same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and gender identity when making admission decisions. Even more remarkable was the lack of consideration for the attitudes of current families. One can reasonably deduce that current students play an important role in shaping the culture of a school. Consequently, further research is needed to define the term “culture,” and the role of students in shaping their schools’ cultures.

Question Four: How do admission policies related to students from same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students shape a private school’s culture and, subsequently, the views of stakeholders?

The survey responses from this sample of school administrators rated school culture as “very important” to private schools and the opinions of stakeholders to be “somewhat important.” Interviewees offered in-depth insights into ways that LGBTQ concerns related to

their Christian schools' admission policies and ways that those policies influenced the culture of the school and attitudes of the stakeholders.

Culture. All interview participants stated that shared values and beliefs were the hallmark of their schools' cultures. Among all five interviewees, those values and beliefs were founded upon biblical principles. The admission policies varied among the five schools represented, but only S1 and S3 had a clearly stated admission policy related to same-sex couples, homosexuality, and transgenderism. The remaining three schools had definitions of marriage, human sexuality statements, and/or statements of faith that were discussed as part of the admission process when evaluating enrollment applications and interviewing prospective students and parents. Two interviewees (S2, S4) explained that their Christian schools practiced open enrollment and acknowledged that not all students or families associated with the school necessarily shared the foundational beliefs of the schools. These two administrators viewed their role in the admission process as making clear to the prospective parents and students exactly what the school teaches. S2 said, "We accept students from all different backgrounds. If we know that they are not a Christian family, then we make sure they understand that we will teach their children from a biblical worldview." S4 concurred when she said she would tell a same-sex couple, "We're going to talk about the biblical worldview, and it might not be in line with what [you] believe." For both of these administrators, the culture of the school was primarily shaped by the faculty and the curricula to instill and develop biblical values in their students.

Interviewees S1, S3, and S5 explained that they guarded their Christian school's culture by handling matters during the admission process. Unlike S2 and S4, the admission process of these three administrators might end in the denial of a student to enroll if they believed the

student could not assimilate into the school's culture due to disagreement with the values, beliefs, rules, and traditions of the school.

S1 described his school as a "covenant" school and explained that the admission process at his school was fairly involved because "the number one thing" for him is to discern whether "this is a family that is going to be supporting the values of scripture or is this a family that is Christian in name only." When denying an application from a lesbian couple, S3 reported that he called the biological mother of the child and said, "I've gone over this, and it doesn't appear to me that you share our values...that we've talked about as a Christian school,...and I don't think it would be good for you to be in our program."

Administrator S5 admitted that the culture of her young Christian school is still evolving. She acknowledged that her admission practices were not currently strong enough to shape the biblical-based culture she envisions for the school. Currently, applicants must "sign that they are in agreement with all aspects of our statement of faith." She noted that she "asked the tough questions" during parent and student interviews to make sure the parents would not promote "things that counter the biblical truths the school is telling them."

In terms of accepting or denying admission to children of same-sex families, S1, S3, and S5 all stated they would not be able to "work with" same-sex parents because they did not share the fundamental values that shaped their schools' cultures. Each of these three interviewees referred to the importance of having a "good fit." S1 and S5 both questioned the use of the term "homosexual" as it referred to students because they believed that most students who claimed to be homosexual were actually struggling with same-sex attraction. As long as students did not enter into a homosexual relationship or did not proselytize a homosexual lifestyle, the administrators believed they could help the student find a healthy identity in Christ. None of the

five interviewees believed they could work with a transgender student, although S2 and S4 were not sure they had the option of denying admission to a transgender student.

Attitudes of stakeholders. When asked about the attitudes of the school's stakeholders toward the admission of children from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students, all five administrators who participated in the interview had differing points of view. Stakeholders were identified during the interview as current parents, board members, and faculty.

Administrator S1, a founder of his Christian school, had the primary decision-making responsibilities for admission policies. He took almost ten seconds during the interview to clearly think through his answer before responding in a way that indicated he believed his most important stakeholders were his current families. Due to the covenantal nature of his school, he believed acceptance of same-sex families or students who had chosen homosexuality or transgenderism would be unacceptable to his current families. He explained his reasoning by saying, "Given that they [current families] came to school with an understanding from day one where we stood on [those issues]... my prediction is that it would devastate our school population...." S1 wanted to be clear that the reason for denial would be "based on the fact—not that they don't want to be around those people—but on the fact that [no one can say] 'there's another Christian organization that compromised.'" S1 expressed more than once that he wanted to be known as an administrator who handled difficult admission decisions with compassion. He was equally concerned that his school be seen as consistently standing, without compromise, upon its moral foundation.

S2 did not believe, based on the international Christian school's enrollment policy, that she had an option to deny admission to a same-sex family, or a homosexual or transgender

student. The stakeholders with whom she was most concerned were the faculty members. S2's school was in the process of strengthening their employment policies regarding the sexual orientation and sexual practices of the teachers they hired. Since the purpose of the school was to teach from scripture and work toward instilling a biblical worldview, she noted that the school was making this move "mostly in order to employ faculty and staff that [*sic*] support the school's beliefs and less for our families."

S3's Christian school does not have a board of directors. The school is owned and administered by the interviewee. When asked how his stakeholders would react if the school were forced to admit same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students, he was confident that the faculty and parents would not only be "extremely unhappy," but would "do whatever they could to help me fight something like that."

Administrator S4, whose classical Christian school has an open enrollment policy, acknowledged a large diversity of opinions would come from the stakeholders of her school if there were a policy to deny admission to children of same-sex couples or homosexual and transgender students. Due to the open enrollment of her school, she believed her current students "have become rather de-sensitized to the whole message around that [the acceptance of homosexual and transgender couples and students]" and would not care one way or the other. She did acknowledge that her school had "a rather large percentage [of families] that are conservative Christians—they would have an issue with that [the enrollment of students with same sex parents and homosexual or transgender students]." S4 estimated that 40% of the parents at the school were conservative. She went on to explain that the unchurched families in the school would be more likely to have a problem with the school's denying admission based on sexual orientation or identity; she suggested that their opinion [unchurched families] would be,

“Well, you’re not loving if you don’t [admit these types of students].” On the other hand, the faculty and staff, S4 noted, would have “a real issue with the admission of a...let’s say an outright transgender or homosexual kid.” S4 commented that because her school was affiliated with a specific church and denomination, the pastor of the church was also considered a stakeholder. She said she would likely consult the pastor of the sponsoring church about the admission of a homosexual or transgender student. When discussing her board of directors, she expressed the concern that the lack of a specific admission policy might lead her board to make a decision based on financial needs of the school.

S5 believed that the primary job of the school was to teach truth. On the one hand, she did not think homosexual parents or students who are struggling with sexual orientation and identity would ever enroll in the school because they would hear biblical teaching that conflicted with that particular lifestyle and life experience. At the same time, she also felt that the opportunity to speak truth into students’ lives was one that she was willing to embrace. When asked how her board and teachers would respond to a legal requirement to accept children with same-sex parents or homosexual and transgender students, she said, “It would be difficult. Why be in operation if you can’t speak the truth?”

Discussion

The researcher undertook this exploratory study of private schools’ admission policies partially in response to an admission decision in her school for which there was no policy to guide the decision-making process. An initial review of the literature revealed only one study (Coley, 2012) conducted among a few leaders of member schools by the Association of Christian Schools International. Coley’s (2012) pre-*Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015) study stressed the importance of having a written policy regarding the admission of students from same-sex

parents. Coley did not recommend a specific course of action but provided several points of view offered by survey participants.

The current exploratory study of private school admission policies sought to build upon the Coley (2012) study by including non-religious (secular) schools and by expanding the sample according to demographic criteria. Survey data analyses revealed that neither geographical location nor school size was related to whether or not schools had official admission policies for students from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students. Regardless of the content of the policy, an average of 75% of respondents reported that their schools did not have an official admission policy for the student groups represented in this study. A “no” response with regard to whether their schools had an official admission policy in place for children of same-sex couples, homosexual, or transgender students was not necessarily an indication that the school does not have a preference with regard to admitting such students.

When the quantitative and qualitative results of the survey were analyzed, the data indicated that for non-religious schools, neither the marital status of parents nor the sexual orientation or gender identity of students was important when making admission decisions. Only a few respondents from non-religious schools indicated they had written policies of non-discrimination, while most of the respondents from non-religious schools simply noted that they do not discriminate. The question of discrimination was not raised in the survey or in the semi-structured interviews, but the optional comments to survey items provided by some non-religious school respondents suggested that they believed that an inherent bias existed in the study. One respondent remarked, “Something about these questions seems off,” while another asked, “Why is this an issue?”

Private schools, both secular and faith-based, generally have some latitude when offering or denying admission to students. However, school leaders who pride themselves on their inclusivity but who have no written admission policy leave themselves vulnerable to legal challenges when they choose to exercise exclusivity.

More than half of the survey sample was comprised of faith-based schools (non-denominational, church-affiliated, or Catholic). Other religious schools included one Catholic, single-gender school, one Jewish school, and two Episcopal schools that did not affiliate with a specific church. Regardless of their stance on same-sex marriage, sexual orientation, or gender identity, almost 73% of faith-based schools did not have an official written policy to address admission of students from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students.

The qualitative data from optional comments to survey items as well as the emergent themes from the interviews indicated that most faith-based schools are in the process of engaging in conversations about ways to relate to same-sex couples or students who struggle with sexual orientation or gender identity. However, one survey respondent from a faith-based school indicated that his school had not discussed any of these matters. Another survey respondent and one interviewee noted that participation in this study had awakened them to the need for an official admission policy. Two survey respondents reported that their schools were in the process of creating a policy and would be interested in reading the results of this study.

As noted in the review of literature, Christian schools have come under scrutiny from many in the media and from advocacy groups. Accusations of hate rhetoric and discrimination abound when students are denied admission to a school because the parents were homosexual or because a student claims to be homosexual or transgender (Allen, 2016; Nagle, 2016). Interviewee S5 commented that her school accepted two families who chose not to come to the

school because the school had a statement indicating that homosexuality and transgenderism were sins. The parents told the administrator she was “too strict,” and they did not want their children to be taught “intolerance and hatred.” Administrator S3 reported that he did not publicize his admission policy on the school’s website for fear he would come under attack and have his policies judged by the media. Though not explicitly stated, an overall examination of the survey comments from respondents of faith-based schools indicates some trepidation about publicizing a written admission policy related to homosexuality or transgenderism.

A critical conclusion one can draw from this study is that the socio-political factors in the external environment of private schools are changing more rapidly than the policies of the schools. Kezar’s (2001) evolutionary model of change may accurately predict that private schools, particularly faith-based schools, may find themselves in the position of responding reactively rather than proactively to difficult admission decisions.

Implications and Recommendations for Educational Organizations

Because the results of the current study indicated that same-sex marriage, homosexuality, and transgenderism were not areas of concern for non-religious schools, the recommendations in this section are written for faith-based schools whose fundamental principles are taken from scripture and are often contrary to the views of society. These recommendations are borne out of analyses of the qualitative data from survey responses and semi-structured interviews. They are not intended to be exhaustive, nor are they intended to address the legalities surrounding admission decisions.

Write an Official Admission Policy

Faith-based schools should have a clearly articulated admission policy and procedures that adequately reflect the biblical values of the school. Christian schools have a constitutional

right to use biblical lifestyle requirements as enrollment criteria, but school administrators should be authentically transparent regarding the biblical influence on the admission policy. Every step of the admission process should reiterate, to both parents and students, what the school believes, teaches, and expects. Parents and students should know what the school stands for and should express written agreement with the school's beliefs and practices prior to admission and enrollment.

Leave No Doubt about What the School Teaches and Believes

The school's mission and belief statements should appear on all school documents, applications, and handbooks. According to the Alliance Defending Freedom, the greatest religious protection for religious schools comes from providing religious instruction consistent with their mission and beliefs (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). Religious instruction should go beyond imparting a Christian worldview with moral and ethical instruction by infusing biblical teaching from the scriptures into the curricula. Teachers should be required to demonstrate that biblical integration consistently takes place in the classroom. Disciplinary procedures should also include religious instruction.

Be Consistent

When applying biblical standards to the admission process, policymakers should be clear and consistent. For example, a school's leadership should be specific about stating whether their school's definition of marriage or their school's lifestyle statement applies only to homosexual couples or extends to divorced or unmarried parents living with someone to whom they are not married. Administrators must know whether a student engages in homosexual behaviors is to receive the same discipline as that applied to heterosexual teens who engage in sexual intimacy. Schools should determine the behaviors and actions they will accept, be clear about

the consequences of engaging in unacceptable behavior, and consistently apply the standards for all students and stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

Scholarly research has not kept pace with the societal acceptance of same-sex marriage and the increasing number of self-identified homosexual and transgender students. Educational research associated with these subjects in relation to private schools and their students is almost non-existent. The suggestions offered here flow directly from the results of this research study and represent merely the tip of an iceberg for potential areas of study.

Future research would benefit from comparisons of more specific demographic criteria such as schools that serve specific grade levels. Because parents may often be more involved in their children's school while the children are young, and due to the limited understanding of elementary school students regarding marriage and human sexuality, same-sex family issues might be more important considerations for stakeholders in schools that serve kindergarten and elementary school students. As suggested by several interview participants, sexual orientation and gender identity concerns may be more prevalent among middle school and high school students.

The idea of sexual orientation and gender identity being a middle school issue was corroborated by three of the five interview participants in the current study. Interviewees suggested, based on their observations, that transgenderism among middle school students presented itself more as a "fad" than as a real, lasting lifestyle choice. Limiting the research to one sector of student groups could also provide a more in-depth look at homosexuality or transgenderism in private schools.

Approximately one-third of the Christian school survey respondents who reported having no admission policy regarding homosexual or transgender students acknowledged that their schools had accepted one or more of the student groups represented in the study. Future research could explore the ways that homosexual or transgender students assimilate into a private religious school, especially when the school provides on-going religious instruction.

A point made by all five interview subjects that mirrored the experience of the researcher is the tendency of Christian schoolteachers to be highly relational in their interactions with students and their families. Another suggestion for future research is to examine ways that Christian school administrators and teachers address and manage a student who has been in their school for years and with whom the school's stakeholders have a strong relationship, but who decides to identify as homosexual or struggles with gender identity in the teenage years. This type of study would probably be qualitative and longitudinal.

A final suggestion for researchers is to carefully investigate schools that have been singled out by popular media or that have faced legal challenges due to their published policies or for an unpopular admission decision. An examination of the historical antecedents, consequences of media scrutiny and subsequent organizational changes of schools that have survived negative publicity may prove beneficial to private Christian school decision-makers. Kezar's (2001) model of evolutionary change would provide a suitable framework to explain ways in which a school might change or adapt in order to survive such a challenge.

Conclusion

The Private School Universe (PSS) survey conducted by the National Center for Education Statistics (Broughman et al., 2019) revealed that during the 2015-2016 academic year, approximately 34,000 private elementary and secondary schools in the United States served

almost five million students. Seventy percent of those private schools self-identified as a religious school ($n = 23,272$). Private schools, whether religious or non-religious, provide an important school choice option to parents of children in kindergarten through 12th grade. This mixed-methods exploratory study adds to the small body of literature related to private school admission policies through the exploration of admission policies and practices of both religious and non-religious schools of all sizes and all grade-levels in every region of the United States. Applying the evolutionary theory of social change (Baker & Baldwin, 2014; Kezar, 2001), this study examined ways that Supreme Court rulings, presidential directives, and sexual orientation and gender identity (SOGI) laws have influenced the admission policies and practices of private schools. The study considered whether current admission policies regarding children from same-sex families or students who identified themselves as homosexual or transgender were reactive or proactive, and the degree to which internal environmental factors influenced admission policies and decisions.

The qualitative and quantitative responses to an online survey indicated that some private secular schools utilize a statement of non-discrimination that includes same-sex parents, sexual orientation, and gender identity while other private secular schools report that they practice non-discrimination and therefore do not need an admission policy to address students with homosexual parents or homosexual and transgender students. Only in responses from administrators of single-gender schools ($n = 2$) was the gender identity of a student an issue.

This study had greater implications for faith-based schools because the results of the study found a lack of cohesive policies and practices among schools who shared the same biblical worldview and offered the same types of biblical instruction. Trade-specific literature indicated that Christian schools are being pressured to acquiesce to the changing cultural

standards regarding human sexuality, including same-sex marriage, claims of LGBT discrimination, and other matters of sexual orientation and gender identity (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Popular literature indicates, and school administrators acknowledge, that their traditional Christian beliefs frequently collide with the rapidly changing socio-political definitions of human sexuality and marriage.

The results of this study indicate that faith-based schools do not have codified admission policies in place to make decisions about the admission of children from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students. Though Christian school administrators admit to receiving applications from same-sex couples who desire a private education for their child(ren), the administrators also note that there has been little to no movement toward a re-examination of or a change to admission policies that address same-sex families, homosexual, and transgender students.

The untapped research potential of private schools' policies, students, and outcomes is extensive. In a rapidly changing socio-political culture that is expanding the rights of LGBTQ families who can afford and desire the quality education and inherent values of a private school, further research is needed to provide guidance to private schools, especially faith-based schools, toward best practices. Legal concerns must be tempered with compassion, and educators need the guidance and support of solid academic research.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A

Survey

Private School Admission Policies

Voluntary Consent for Online Survey

This survey is designed to gather information for a research study conducted by Karen Caroe as part of her Ed.D. dissertation. The purpose of this research study is to investigate private school admissions policies with regard to students from same-sex families and/or homosexual or transgender students. The principal investigator is Dr. Patty LeBlanc, Professor in the College of Education, at Southeastern University. This research survey has been approved by the Institutional Review Board of Southeastern University.

All responses are anonymous and confidential. Results of the survey are based on aggregated data and no school can or will be identified.

By taking this survey, you certify that you are 18 years of age or older and that you consent to participate. If you have any questions related to this survey, please feel free to contact me at 575-571-7491 or kkcaroe@seu.edu. You may also contact Dr. LeBlanc by email at pbleblanc@seu.edu.

Private School Admission Policies

Demographic Information

1. What is your role at the school?

☐ Principal, Headmaster, Administrator

☐ Board Member

☐ Counselor

☐ Registrar

☐ Other (please specify)

* 2. How would you classify your school?

☐ Non-denominational Christian School

☐ Church Affiliated School

☐ Catholic School

☐ Non-religious private school

☐ Other (please specify)

* 3. Please indicate the size of your school.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="radio"/> Less than 100 students | <input type="radio"/> 500-699 students |
| <input type="radio"/> 100-249 students | <input type="radio"/> 700-999 students |
| <input type="radio"/> 250-499 students | <input type="radio"/> Over 1000 students |

Optional Comment

4. What grade levels do you serve?

- | | |
|--|----------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> K-5 | <input type="radio"/> 6-8 |
| <input type="radio"/> K-8 | <input type="radio"/> 6-12 |
| <input type="radio"/> K-12 | <input type="radio"/> 9-12 |
| <input type="radio"/> Other (please specify) | |

* 5. In which region of the country is your school located?

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="radio"/> New England (ME, VT, NH, RI, MA, CT) | <input type="radio"/> Southwest (NM, OK, AZ, TX) |
| <input type="radio"/> Mid-Atlantic (PA, MD, VA, WV, DE, NJ, NY) | <input type="radio"/> West (CO, WY, MT, UT, NV, CA, HI) |
| <input type="radio"/> Southeast (FL, GA, NC, SC, KY, TN, AL, MS, LA, AR) | <input type="radio"/> Northwest (ID, OR, WA, AK) |
| <input type="radio"/> Midwest (OH, IN, MI, IL, MO, WI, MN, IA, KS, NE, ND, SD) | |

Additional Comment on Location

6. Please write or paste your school's mission statement here. (You may eliminate school identifiers).

We are interested in learning how your school admissions policy is impacted by same-sex marriage and/or homosexual and transgender students.

* 7. Does your school have an official admissions policy regarding students from same-sex families?

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please explain or paste the part of your policy that addresses this issue.
You may eliminate school identifiers.

8. Has your school accepted students from same-sex families for admission?

☐

Yes

☐

No

Optional Comment

* 9. Does your school have an official admissions policy regarding the admission of homosexual students?

☐

Yes

☐

No

If yes, please explain or paste the part of your policy that addresses this issue.
You may eliminate school identifiers.

10. Has your school accepted homosexual students for admission?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Optional Comment

* 11. Does your school have an official admissions policy regarding transgender students?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please explain or paste the part of your policy that addresses this issue.
You may eliminate school identifiers.

12. Has your school accepted transgender students for admission?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Optional Comment

13. Was your school's current admission policy created in response to an admissions decision regarding students from same-sex families or homosexual/transgender students?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Please explain

14. If your school has not yet encountered any of these types of admissions decisions, how likely would your school be to...?

	Very unlikely	Unlikely	Likely	Very likely
admit students from same-sex families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
admit homosexual students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
admit transgender students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Optional Comments

15. Based on the responses to questions about the likelihood of your school admitting students from same-sex families, homosexual or transgender students, who would be the **primary** decision-maker?

- ☐ Administration
 ☐ Admissions Committee
☐ Counselor
 ☐ Church
☐ School Board
☐ Other (please specify)

* 16. When considering students from same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students for admission, what factors are important to consider?

	Not important	Somewhat important	Important	Very important
The school's mission	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The school's culture	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The attitude of the teacher/faculty	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
The attitude of current families	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Biblical/Church doctrine	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Other

17. Does your admission policy appear on the school website?

☐ Yes

☐ No

18. Could a visitor to the school website readily discern your school's admission policy with regard to same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students?

☐ Yes

☐ No

Comment

Private School Admission Policies

Thank -you

Thank you for time and effort on behalf of this study. The results of the research study will help private schools make decisions on these important issues and help guide best practices in private school admission policies. If you have any questions or concerns, please email: kkcaroe@seu.edu

19. Would you like to receive the results of the study?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If Yes, provide an email address

20. Would you be willing to participate in a short interview?

☐ Yes

☐ No

If yes, please provide your preferred way to be contacted.

Appendix B

Interview Guide*

Interview Protocol: Perspective of a school administrator on his or her school's policy regarding the admission of children from same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students.

Interviewer: Karen Caroe

Interviewee:

Date:

Time:

Location:

1.	How long have you been an administrator at your school? (Follow up: Can you tell me a little about your school?)
2.	Has your school received any applications for admission from same-sex families, or homosexual, or transgender students?
3	Does your school take any state or federal funding through school choice, Title I, Title II or some other program? (Follow up: Do you have any concerns that you may be forced to make a decision between funding and philosophy?)
4.	How do you make admission decisions, in general? (Follow-up: What goes into making a decision on students from same-sex families, or who are homosexual, or transgender?)
5.	What would you say are the top 3 factors that must be taken into consideration when making those decisions? (Follow up: Please explain why those factors are most important?)
6.	How do you think your schools' parents, students, faculty, and board would respond if private schools were required to admit students with same-sex parents and/or homosexual or transgender students?
7.	Have you experienced any positive or negative effects from your admission policy decisions? (Follow-up: Please explain)
8.	If you could advise another school on how to handle admission of students with same-sex parents and/or homosexual or transgender students, what would you say?

*The questions in this guide are representative of the information being sought by the researcher. The guide may be modified based on survey results.

Appendix C

Adult Consent to be Interviewed

PROJECT TITLE:

AN EXPLORATORY STUDY OF PRIVATE SCHOOL ADMISSION POLICIES FOR STUDENTS OF SAME-SEX PARENTS AND HOMOSEXUAL OR TRANSGENDER STUDENTS

INVESTIGATORS

Principal Investigator: Dr. Patty LeBlanc, Southeastern University, Student Investigator: Karen Caroe

PURPOSE:

The purpose of this study is (a) to determine whether private religious and secular schools have policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students; (b) how those types of decisions are made; and (c) the principles underlying admission decisions.

PROCEDURES

The researcher will contact you to schedule an interview by phone, virtual meeting, or in person. The interview will be audio-recorded, transcribed, and returned to you for validation. The interview will consist of approximately eight questions, with possible follow-up questions, and will not take more than one hour of your time.

RISKS OF PARTICIPATION

There are no known risks to participation in this study. You will not be personally identified in any reports or publications of the results. In addition, any references to your school will be re-coded so that individuals and schools cannot be identified.

BENEFITS TO PARTICIPATION

Your participation will add to an understanding of ways that private schools respond to social changes in their external environment. This information will help inform other schools of admission trends.

CONFIDENTIALITY

The audio-recordings, transcripts, and notes of this interview will be made available only to the student researcher, primary investigator, and the dissertation committee's methodologist. Written results will not include information that could identify you. Raw recordings and transcriptions will be stored on a password-protected computer and backed up on a USB drive stored in a locked filing cabinet. Only researchers and individuals responsible for research oversight will have access to the records. Recordings and transcriptions will be destroyed five years after the study has been completed.

CONTACTS

You may contact the researchers should you desire to discuss your participation in the study:
Karen Caroe: 575-571-7491, kkaroe@seu.edu Dr. Patty LeBlanc: pbleblanc@seu.edu.

PARTICIPANT RIGHTS

I understand that my participation is voluntary, that there is no penalty for refusal to participate, and that I am free to withdraw my consent and participation in this project at any time without penalty.

CONSENT DOCUMENTATION

I have read and fully understand this consent form. I sign it freely and voluntarily. A copy of this form will be given to me. I affirm that I am 18 years old or older. I hereby give permission for my participation in this study.

Signature of Participant

Date

Printed Name of Participant

I certify that I have personally explained this document before requesting that the participant sign it.

Signature of Researcher

Date

Appendix D

Survey of Leadership Academy Participants Colorado Springs, Colorado July 2012

The following survey contains questions or statements related to the admission procedures and enrollment of a student from a household of a same sex couple. Dr. Ken Coley and Dr. Tom Cathey are conducting this survey in preparation for an article to be published in an upcoming edition of the *Legal/Legislative Update*, a publication of ACSI. Please be assured of your anonymity and a commitment from the researchers that at no time will your responses be connected with your identity or the identity of your school. If you choose to respond to the short answer questions, quotes may appear in an article. You may skip any question that you would rather not answer. Your cooperation is greatly appreciated.

- 1) Our school has been approached by a same sex couple for the purpose of admitting their child.
Yes No (Please circle one response.)
Approximate number of times _____
Approximate year (date) of the first contact/inquiry from a same sex couple _____
- 2) It is my understanding that our school would respond to the above situation by... (Check best answer :)
_____ **Allowing admission, should the child meet all other requirements**
_____ **Not allow admission for this specific reason**
_____ **I am unsure how we would react.**
- 3) Our school has a policy regarding admission of a student from a same sex couple.
Yes No (Please circle one response.) **If yes, please state the policy on the back of this survey.**
- 4) Our school board has discussed this issue in particular and... (Check best answer.)
_____ **Framed a policy**
_____ **Determined that existing policies covered this issue**
_____ **Took no action**
_____ **The Board considers admissions policies should be left to the administration.**
_____ **The Board has not reviewed this issue.**
- 5) The opportunity for the salvation of the child is paramount in our decision to admit a child from such a household. (Please circle best response.)

Strongly agree Agree Uncertain Disagree Strongly Disagree

Short response: (Your statements may appear as anonymous quotes in a publication.)

- Scripture or doctrinal ideas that our school believes apply to this discussion are...
- As the leader, my biggest fear/concern in considering accepting a student from a same sex household would be...
- If a current student's family structure changed to become a same-sex marriage structure, our school would respond by...

Please contact the researchers if you desire a summary of the responses.

kcoley@sebts.edu

Tom_Cathey@acsi.org