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"You don't want to get anything wrong. That's the trouble isn't it": Exploring primary school teachers' constructions of heteronormativity in schools in Wales.

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Summary

This thesis consists of three parts: a major literature review; an empirical paper; and a critical appraisal. The aim of the thesis is to explore primary school teachers' constructions of heteronormativity in schools in Wales. More specifically, it aims to explore teachers' understanding of sex, gender, sexuality and how these are intertwined in heteronormativity and how heteronormativity may impact our children and young people when they are in school.

Section A: Major Literature Review

Section A aims to provide a detailed review of the literature in this area, which is presented in two parts. The first offers the historical and cultural background of heteronormativity in schools, and the second offers a systematic review of the literature, which is presented in a thematic synthesis. The relevance to the practice of Educational Psychologists (EPs) is also provided before the rationale for the current research is presented, alongside the research question.

Section B: Major Empirical Study

Section B presents an empirical paper, which begins with an overview of the relevant literature, the rationale for the study and the research question. Methodology for the research is presented, followed by an analysis section which summarises the thematic analysis conducted, with links to theory and previous research provided. Implications for EPs and school staff are presented, as well as strengths and limitations of the current study, and potential areas for further research.

Section C: Critical Appraisal

Section C details a critical review of the research journey, including the study's contribution to knowledge and understanding in its field, and to the context of education and educational psychology. It offers a reflexive account of the researcher's experience of conducting the study and includes extracts from the researcher's research diary in order to appraise the decisions made throughout the process.

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Abbreviations

AEP – Association of Educational Psychologists

ALNCo – Additional Learning Needs Coordinator

BPS – British Psychological Society

CYP – children and young people

DEdPsy – Doctorate in Educational Psychology

EP – Educational Psychologist

EPS – Educational Psychology Service

HBT – homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (bullying)

HBTH – homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and heteronormative (bullying)

HCPC – Health and Care Profession Council

LA – Local Authority

LGBTQ+ - lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, plus other (non-heterosexual/cisgender) identities.

PRISMA – Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses

RSE – Relationships and Sexualities Education

TEP – Trainee Educational Psychologist

TLR – Teaching and Learning Responsibility

UK – United Kingdom

WG – Welsh Government

Key Vocabulary

Biphobia – dislike or prejudice against bisexual people

Bisexual – those who are sexually or romantically attracted to more than one sex or gender.

Cisgender – those whose gender identity is aligned with their gender assigned at birth.

Dead name (dead-naming) – to call a trans person by their birth name when they have changed their name as part of their gender transition.

Gay – those who are sexually or romantically attracted exclusively to people of their own sex or gender (most commonly used on association with men).

Gender binary – a system of gender classification in which all people are categorised as male or female.

Gender variance/gender nonconformity – behaviour or gender expression by an individual that does not match masculine or feminine gender norms.

Heteroactivism – an ideological and strategic response to LGBTQ+ equalities, position heteronormativity as foundation for a healthy and sustainable society.

Heteronormativity – the "pervasive and often invisible norm of heterosexuality that assumes a binary conception of sex (male/female), corresponding gender expression (masculine/feminine), and a natural attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality)" (Krebbekx, 2021, p18).

Heterosexism – discrimination of prejudice against gay people on the assumption that heterosexuality is the normal sexual orientation.

Heterosexual – those who are sexually or romantically attracted exclusively to people of the opposite sex.

Homonormativity – refers to the replication of heteronormative values by homosexual people (Bollas, 2021).

Homophobia – dislike or prejudice against gay people

Homosocial masculinity – defines a form of nonsexual male bonding that involves viewing women as sexual objects.

Intersex – a general term used to describe a variety of conditions in which a person is born with a reproductive or sexual anatomy that does not fit the typical definitions of male or female.

Lesbian – women who are sexually or romantically attracted exclusively to other women.

Non-binary – a gender identity that is outside of the gender binary.

Queer – an umbrella term used to refer to those who have gender and/or sexual identities other than heterosexual and cisgender.

Trans/Transgender – an umbrella term for people who self-identify and/or express their gender in a way that differs from their gender assigned at birth (McBride & Schubotz, 2017).

Transphobia – dislike or prejudice against transgender people

"You don't want to get anything wrong. That's the trouble isn't it": Exploring primary school teachers' constructions of heteronormativity in schools in Wales.

Section A: Major Literature Review

Word count: 12,892

<u>1.0 Structure of the Literature Review</u>

1.1 Introduction

The following literature review explores the influence of heteronormativity on children and young people (CYP) within schools in the UK. First, it explores the cultural and historical landscape, including legislation which may have influenced the way in which heteronormativity is upheld within school systems. The second part consists of a systematic literature review which is concerned with answering the literature review question: *what does the literature tell us about the influence of heteronormativity on children and young people in schools within the United Kingdom?* A thematic synthesis of the literature is offered which seeks to explore the research undertaken across the UK, including the role of EPs in disrupting heteronormativity in the schools they serve.

It should be acknowledged that through personal experiences, and exposure to the literature, this researcher holds the position that schools *are* heteronormative. The use of the Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) tools (see section 1.7) and engagement in regular supervision were used in an attempt to maintain balance through this major literature review, and the following empirical study. However, this position would have undoubtably influenced my research practices and as such it is further explored in section 2.2 of my critical appraisal, found in section C of this thesis.

1.2 Rationale and literature search questions

The work of the LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall and their 'School Report' generated in Britain, and Wales in the 'School Report Cymru' (Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b), tells us that there is much to celebrate in this area, with CYP feeling more comfortable than ever being themselves in school. Despite this, more than half of LGBTQ+ pupils are bullied in school across the United Kingdom (Stonewall 2017a; Stonewall 2017b); queer CYP are still unlikely to learn about safe sex in same sex relationships and are more likely to experiences poor mental health (Bowskill, 2017; Formby, 2017;

Stonewall, 2017; Yavuz, 2016). This raises questions about what happens within our school environments that causes many LGBTQ+ CYP to feel so unhappy in education.

One possible explanation is that schools can be thought of as 'heteronormative institutions' (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). This idea suggests that despite a growing understanding that gender and sexuality are socially constructed phenomena (Butler, 1999; Burr, 2015), heteronormativity continues to prevail as a cultural force, that is particularly saliant in institutions, like schools (DePalma & Jennett, 2010). This is because the gender binary is perpetuated and sexuality norms continue to be reproduced, and thus maintained in these institutions (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018; Atkinson, 2021; Markland, Sargeant & Wright, 2022). This cultural force perpetuates the heteronormative ideal which can be defined as the "pervasive and often invisible norm of heterosexuality that assumes a binary conception of sex (male/female), corresponding gender expression (masculine/feminine), and a natural attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality)" (Krebbekx, 2021, p. 18). This continues to maintain a dominant discourse that positions heterosexuality and binary concepts of gender as the norms within our society (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). The heteronormative process intimately connects sex, gender, and sexuality (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Addison, 2012) with heterosexuality and conformity to (cis)gender norms being understood as natural and good (Addison, 2012). This serves to privilege those who adhere to sexual and gender norms, and pathologizes queer identities (Addison, 2012; Markland et al., 2022). This often results in discriminatory reactions towards LGBTQ+ people that begin at a young age, with homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and heteronormative (HBTH) bullying being documented within the primary-age range (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). As a result of this, the purpose of this literature review was to explore the influence of heteronormativity on CYP in schools in the UK and aimed to answer the following literature review question:

What does the literature tell us about the influence of heteronormativity on children and young people in schools within the United Kingdom?

1.3 Search strategy and terms

A systematic search was conducted to identify articles specifically related to the topic of heteronormativity within the school context. The review conducted attempted to use systematically explicit methods to identify and critically appraise literature relevant to the above literature review question (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2019).

The search strategy was guided by Siddaway et al. (2019) and included a search in six online databases. These included the British Education Index (BEI), APA PsycInfo, Scopus, Web of Science, Education Resources Information Centre (ERIC) and Applied Social Sciences Index & Abstracts (ASSIA). These databases were selected because of their focus on social sciences and education; this helped ensure a good coverage of the relevant literature. However, a review cannot solely rely on electronic databases, as they are not totally comprehensive and potentially relevant work may be missed (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005; Siddaway et al., 2019). As a result, reference lists of articles located through the database search were scanned for potentially relevant work; manual searches in educational psychology journals were also completed (Siddaway et al., 2019). To go some way towards overcoming publication bias, which can be defined as the tendency for the publication of work with clear, or striking, findings (Petticrew, Egan, Thomson, Hamilton, Kunkler & Roberts, 2008), searches for unpublished work, such as unpublished doctoral theses, was conducted. A grey literature search was also completed through OpenGrey, for work such as Government and charity reports, with the acknowledgement that these may not be as dependable as peer-reviewed research.

A scoping exercise was completed during the competition of the proposal for this research project; this was completed in December 2021 and January 2022. This scoping exercise formed the basis for the search criteria used in this systematic search. The search strategy was based upon three key subject mapping terms: "heteronormativity", "schools" and "UK". The search terms (Table 1) were based on synonyms, some of which were discovered during the initial scoping exercise; terms

were combined to increase specificity in the yielded results. This search was completed in August and September 2022.

Table 1 - Key Terms utilised in the Literature Review

Subject Mapping Terms	Key Word Search Terms	Rationale
1. Heteronormativity	"heteronorm*" "LGBT*" "Gender Normative Policy"	This review intended to find articles that examined heteronormativity. A variety of similar terms were found during the scoping review (Dec 2021-Jan 2022)
2. Schools	"Primary school*" "Secondary school*" "Education*" "Classroom*" "School*"	This review intended to find articles that examined heteronormativity in school settings
3. UK	"Wales" "England" "Scotland" "Northern Ireland" "United Kingdom" "Britain"	This study was taking place in the UK and will therefore be influenced by UK legislation; this review was therefore limited to the UK context to reflect the major empirical study.

Note. An asterisk indicates a truncated search term, e.g., "school*" would also include the words "schools" and "schooling".

1.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

The researcher first reviewed titles and abstracts, then full articles, for their appropriateness to be included in the literature review. The guide for selection of literature can be found in Table 2.

Table 2 - Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria	Exclusion Criteria	Rationale
1. Location Studies were included if they took place in the UK	Studies were excluded if they took place outside of the UK	The present empirical study took place in the UK and was therefore heavily influenced by UK legislation, such as The Equality Act. This major literature review therefore attempted to reflect this cultural context.
2. Publication Date Studies were included if published since 2010.	Studies were excluded if they were published before 2010.	2010 saw the introduction of the Equality Act in Britain. This aimed to protect individuals from discrimination, based on a series of 'protected characteristics', this included sexuality and gender identity. This reinforced schools' statutory responsibilities towards protecting gender and sexuality equality for the first time. This

		legislation is therefore likely to have had a significant impact upon the influence of heteronormativity in school settings.
3. Quality Papers were included if they had appeared in a journal. Unpublished doctoral theses that had been through the vigorous Viva process, were also included.	Studies were excluded if they had not been published in a journal	Quality of studies would have been checked if published in a journal.
4. 'Participants' Papers were included if relevant to experiences of children and young people (CYP) e.g., CYP talking about their own experiences, adults talking retrospectivity about their school experiences, or teachers/school staff talking about CYP.	Studies were excluded if participants were adults discussing the effects of heteronormativity in schools e.g., the impact on teachers or parents.	This review intended to discover the influence of heteronormativity on CYP in schools.
5. Relevance to education Papers were included if they discussed education.	Studies were excluded if they did not refer to schooling/education e.g., if they were related to the medical field.	This review intended to discover the influence of heteronormativity on CYP in school environments.

1.5 Search Outcomes

In total, 32 journal articles were retrieved through the systematic literature search, a further 17 relevant papers and unpublished theses were also included via additional search methods; giving a total of 48 included works. A further 12 legislative documents and charity reports were included through a search of the grey literature, to offer a historical and cultural background. The screening process for inclusion is outlined using the Preferred Reporting Items for Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses (PRISMA) and can be found in figure 1.

Figure 1 PRIMSA
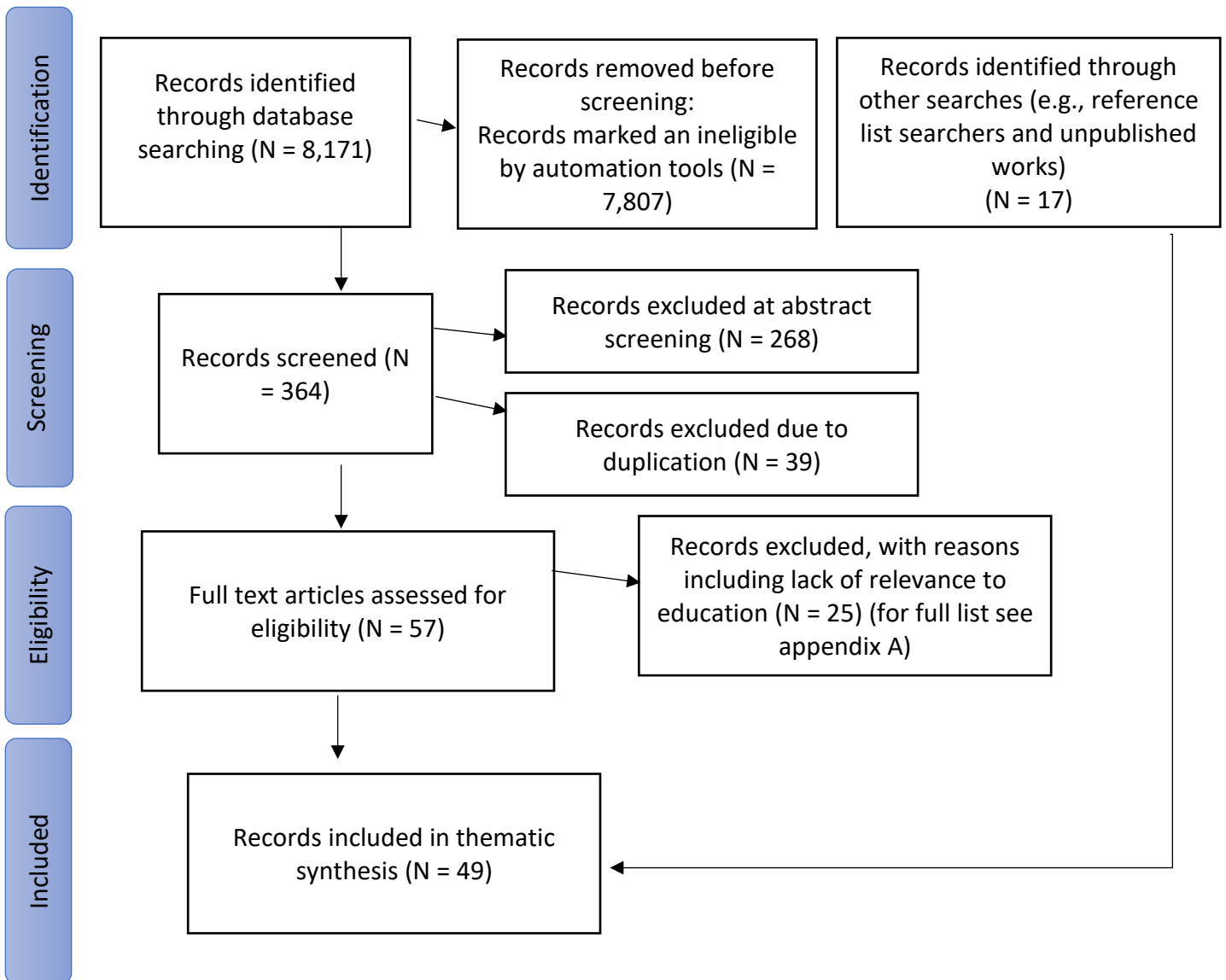
1.6 Quality appraisal

The Critical Appraisal Skills Programme (CASP) was used as an aid to evaluate the quality of the qualitative research included in this review (an example of its use is provided in appendix B).

1.7 Structure

The included works were subject to a thematic synthesis, whereby key themes have been identified to organise the literature review (Braun & Clarke, 2013). These key themes were identified through multiple readings of the included papers, and the themes are offered as subheadings to support the readers' navigation through the literature review. The thematic synthesis is reported in two parts. The first introduces the contextual landscape and historical background, including key legislative documents (both past and present) that are relevant in the exploration of heteronormativity in schools. The second part consists of a more focused review of the literature which is concerned with answering the literature review question:

'What does the literature tell us about the influence of heteronormativity on children and young people in schools within the United Kingdom?'.

2.0 Part one: The contextual and historical background

Before considering the influence of heteronormativity on children in schools, it is important to acknowledge the historical and contextual factors that may have contributed to this cultural phenomenon called 'heteronormativity' and how this plays out in school environments.

2.1 The Historical Background

1988 saw the enactment of the Section 28 of the Local Government Act by Margaret Thatcher's conservative government which put into place a "prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or by publishing material" (Local Government Act, 1988). This Local Government Act was revoked in 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in England and Wales and was celebrated as a turning point for LGBTQ+ equality (Hall, 2020). Despite this, Section 28 laid the foundation that would influence the educational landscapes with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusivity for decades, with a fear around teaching LGBTQ+ issues continuing to this day (Robinson, 2010; Drury, Stride, Firth & Fitzgerald, 2022).

Following the abolition of Section 28, teachers continue to be left confused about how to approach sex education, which likely impacts on the way in which LGBTQ+ individuals are supported in school (Page & Yip, 2012). Staff continue to worry about teaching about gender and sexuality, and this is perpetuated through a lack of teacher education on LGBTQ+ issues, leaving them feeling unprepared to tackle these issues (Robinson, 2010; Bowskill, 2017). The research suggests that despite the repeal, the act continues to have an overshadowing effect, with cultural assumptions and taboos about sexuality and gender expression continuing to uphold a fear in teachers about being seen to 'promote' homosexuality (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Carlile, 2020). Research suggests teachers remain reluctant to tackle LGBTQ+ issues and feel paranoid about being seen to discuss LGBTQ+ issues due to fears of complaints from parents of colleagues (Robinson, 2010; Saunton & Simpson, 2011). This fear, or lack of confidence, from teachers is believed to have resulted in a culture that facilitates

homophobic, biphobic and transphobic (HBT) bullying, through teachers' reluctance to tackle HBT bullying, such as not stopping, or questioning, the use of 'gay' as an insult (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Robinson, 2010).

2.2 The Cultural and Political Landscape

The Gender Recognition Act of 2004 saw those whose births are registered in the UK able to have the affirmed gender recorded on their birth certificate. This was open to those aged 18 and over who have a diagnosis of gender dysphoria and have been living in their acquired gender for at least 2 years (UK government, 2004). Whilst such legislation does exist, the Transgender Equality First Report of 2015 argues the outdated nature of the act, with the UK still falling short in ensuring fairness and equality for trans people, with high levels of transphobia continuing to be experienced by trans people (House of Commons, 2015). The act does not include gender identities outside of the gender binary and a need for a diagnosis of gender dysphoria is considered medicalising, outdated and pathologizing (House of Commons, 2015). With regards to the school context, the report highlights how school guidance may be failing trans pupils, with a lack of basic understanding of gender variance among many education professionals. Resultingly, schools may not be supporting gender variant CYP and their families. As such, improvements to staff training, including initial teacher training, are required to ensure that staff have a clear understanding of their responsibilities under the Equality Act (UK Government, 2010).

The Equality Act (UK Government, 2010) included the characteristic 'gender reassignment' and offered protection to those who self-identify as transgender, protection for the first time (Nash & Browne, 2021). Four years later the Department for Education released guidance for schools regarding how they might interpret the Equality Act, highlighting that schools must ensure equality of opportunity for all pupils and must not unlawfully discriminate against pupils because of the protected characteristics within the act (Department for Education, 2014; Abbott, Ellis & Abbott, 2015). This reinforced schools' statutory responsibilities towards protecting gender

and sexuality equality and is often relied upon by teachers as a mandate for their work (Carlile, 2020; Hall, 2020).

Since the Equality Act, the UK Government has sanctioned several reports to determine the progress made. One such report, titled 'Improving LGBT lives: Government Action Since 2010', highlighted that they want schools to be safe and supportive environments for all children regardless of their gender identity or sexual orientation (Government Equalities Office, 2018). Despite this, the Equality Act continues to contain the terms 'gender reassignment' and 'transsexual' which are outdated and are not inclusive of all members of the trans community (House of Commons, 2015). In addition, most of the actions put forward by the Equalities Office in this report are related to reducing HBT bullying in schools and tackling hate crime. This is likely because of the Government Equalities Office commissioned review into the inequality among LGBTQ+ groups in the UK (Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016) which highlighted that LGBTQ+ people continue to face discrimination, harassment disadvantage and inequality in the UK, with education being highlighted as one of the areas where the evidence base for this inequality was greatest. However, the focus may be better set on the vastly different expectations of Relationships and Sexualities Education (RSE) across the UK, which could go some way towards increasingly inclusivity, and in turn, reducing discrimination (House of Commons, 2015; Patterson, McDaid, Hunt, Hilton, Flowers, McMillan, Milne & Lorimer, 2020). Pupils continue to be taught about LGBTQ+ issues in a negative way in RSE lessons, with schools not covering issues in a positive way, facing higher incidences of bullying among the LGBTQ+ population (Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016). This variety of schooling experience was also found in a report commissioned by the Children's Commissioner for England to discover 'how gender matters' to CYP (Renold, Bragg, Jackson & Ringrose, 2017). Their findings highlighted the variation in experiences between schools and regions, with gender norms and expectations continuing to have an influence on CYP's lives. They argued that objects and activities remain acutely gendered in most schools e.g., school uniforms remaining regulatory of gender norms and the gender binary. Schools may therefore remain heteronormative, with the pressure of platonic boy-girl friendships to become (hetero)sexualised increasing as

pupils become older, and queer pupils being alienated (Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016; Renold et al., 2017). To add, CYP who do not prescribe to heteronormative ideals may be subject to harassment and attack, with HBT bullying continuing to be a problem in education (Hudson-Sharp & Metcalf, 2016; Renold et al., 2017).

There have been several projects that have taken place in the UK in attempt to dismantle the heteronormativity which is causing problems for LGBTQ+ pupils; the most famous of these is the 'No Outsiders Project' (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Atkinson, 2021). This was an action research project, involving primary school teachers from across the UK, taking place between 2006 and 2008, which sought to disrupt heteronormativity in a direct challenge to the prevalent legacy of Section 28 (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Atkinson, 2021). The research team explored ways heteronormativity could be disrupted within primary education including the introduction of LGBTQ+ inclusive texts, creating inclusive policies and diversity celebrations (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). The project also explored how gender, sex and sexuality are often conflated through the process of heteronormativity and constructs what appropriate behaviour is for 'boys' and 'girls' (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). The project endeavoured to move away from the discourse of victimisation that occurs in schools through the anti-bullying/homophobia rhetoric, and toward incorporating discussions around sexuality and gender into the curriculum. The impact of the project has been long lasting, with Atkinson (2021) (daughter of one of the original researchers) comparing the attitudes of children in two schools, one of which took part in the No Outsiders Project, and one of which that did not. Her findings highlighted that the inclusion of formal equalities discourses, embedded within the curriculum, resulted in non-heterosexuality being viewed more favourably and understood as acceptable by pupils. Included schools also remained more open about diverse identities and continue to provide children with the language to actualise non-heteronormative identities over a decade after the competition of the project (Atkinson, 2021). Despite the project being backed by Ofsted, No Outsiders received significant push back in some communities, most notably with protests outside schools in predominantly Muslim areas of Birmingham (BBC, 2019). Here, concerned parents and community members protested daily about the materials children were being

exposed to in class as part of the project, which they felt may be against their religious beliefs (BBC, 2019).

2.3 The Welsh Context

In 2011 the Welsh Government released a series of anti-bullying guidance documents for schools including one aimed at homophobic bullying (Welsh Government, 2011a) and one aimed at tackling sexist, sexual and transphobic bullying (Welsh Government, 2011b). The first acknowledges the confusion caused by Section 28 and states that "there are no, and never have been, any legal barriers to teachers and staff discussing issues around sexual orientation in the classroom and responding to, and preventing, homophobic bullying" (Welsh Government, 2011a, p. 10). Both documents advocate for preventative, whole-school approaches that foster inclusive cultures within schools. This includes encouraging schools to develop statements of their position against HBT bullying and the development of inclusive classroom displays (Welsh Government, 2011a; Welsh Government, 2011b). The need to ensure staff training is up to date is also highlighted to allow staff to be clear on what constitutes HBT bullying so they can tackle it. It was stated that this should develop staff confidence and skills to enable classroom debate to challenge stereotypes and use the curriculum to promote equality and enable pupils to challenge discrimination and stereotypes (Welsh Government, 2011a; Welsh Government, 2011b).

Despite this effort, it seems there remains much to do before LGBTQ+ equality is achieved within our schools and the picture is Wales appears graver than the rest of Britain. The LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall, highlights in their school reports that considerably higher numbers of LGBTQ+ pupils report experiencing bullying in Wales compared to the rest of the UK, 54% compared with 45%, respectively (Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b). This is particularly pronounced among trans CYP with 73% experiencing bullying in Wales compared to 64% in the rest of the UK (Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b). With Wales having the highest percentage of LGBTQ+ pupils being bullied for being queer in the UK, comes concerning mental health and wellbeing statistics for Welsh LGBTQ+ CYP with 25% of LGB CYP and 41% of trans young people

reporting that they have attempted to take their own lives (Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b). It should be noted that due to the nature of these reports, full methodological information is not provided. It is therefore difficult to know how these data were collected and analysed; reader discretion is therefore advised.

Relationships and Sexualities Education (RSE) is now a mandatory element of the curriculum and Welsh Government have set out a Relationships and Sexualities Education Code (Welsh Government, 2021b) which is hoped will increase inclusivity and reduce LGBTQ+ discrimination. This curriculum was informed by recommendations from an expert education panel established by the education secretary to inform this curriculum (Welsh Government, 2017). The panel was keen to strengthen Wales' rights and equity approach to RSE and move on from the guidance previously given, to ensure that RSE, not just sex education, was made mandatory; thus ensuring high quality RSE for all CYP in Wales. They highlighted that the previous RSE was heteronormative, rarely inclusive, with LGBTQ+ experiences rarely covered (Welsh Government, 2017). The new curriculum sees a shift away from a biological focus and towards a focus on equity, emotions and forming healthy relationships (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government, 2021b). LGBTQ+ diversity is mentioned several times throughout the act with links made in all strands of the new code (Welsh Government, 2021b) to "develop learners' awareness of different identities, views and values and the diversity of relationships, gender and sexuality, including LGBTQ+ lives." (p. 3). The Welsh Government guidance for a whole school approach to mental health and emotional wellbeing also highlights the importance of RSE in empowering learners, at developmentally appropriate stages, to build knowledge, skills, and ethical values to equip them to understand how relationships, sex, gender, and sexuality shape their lives, and the lives of others (Welsh Government, 2021a). It emphasises that RSE should not be delivered in isolation but integrated and embedded within the whole curriculum. It is hoped that this push for holistic and inclusive RSE will help tackle HBT bullying; challenge gender stereotypes and increase pupils understanding of safe, positive relationships (Welsh Government, 2017; Welsh Government 2021a). These efforts highlight Welsh Government's commitment to LGBTQ+ inclusivity within

education, in the hope of reducing HBT bullying, which may be more prevalent in Wales than other UK counterparts (Stonewall, 2017a).

3.0 Part two: The influence of heteronormativity in schools

3.1 Schools create gender?

Research tells us that schools are one of the most influential places in which the learning of masculinities and femininities takes place, they are therefore one of the key places where our gender identity is developed with children 'performing' girl or boy as a result of reading external cues which may force them into gendered categories (DePalma, 2013; DePalma, 2016; Robinson, 2010; Yavuz, 2016). DePalma & Jennett (2010) argue that the way in which we enact gender is purposeful, and not just a passively experienced phenomena, this can be seen through the repetitions of scripts, attitudes and practices that result in cultural gender norms. These continue to be matched with biological sex, and are therefore understood as natural, rather than socially constructed (Addison, 2012; Burr, 2015; DePalma, 2013; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). Any variance from the norm is often constructed as defiance, or is even pathologized in school settings (DePalma, 2013). This is seen from the early years, where pupils' interactions with material objects can shape their gender performance (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Slater, Jones & Procter 2018). For example, early years classrooms act as a place for social learning in which gender is produced, with role play within the 'home corner' and 'small world' areas central to the performance of gender (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019). This can be confounded by other material objects in schools, such as gendered toilets and the available literature (DePalma, 2016; Slater et al., 2018). These examples have the power to act as facilitators to the disruption of gender roles, or as reinforcers of the gendered messages children receive in the classroom; this difference is often a result of the gendered expectations of school staff (Abbott, Weckesser & Egan, 2021; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Slater et al., 2018). Although Lyttleton-Smith's (2019) focus on the classroom environment was post hoc, their research offers valuable insight into the influence of the material world. Even when CYP show strong support for challenging gender norms, they can find material world of their school is structured to reinforce the notion of the traditional gender binary, through uniforms, toilets, and PE lessons (Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018).

Gender policing begins in the primary school, with the reinforcement of gender roles and sexualities by both peers and teaching staff (Abbott et al., 2021; DePalma, 2013). Heteronormative masculinity and femininity practices are often required in school cultures with teachers being sure about what constitutes a 'proper girl' or a 'proper boy', and how these roles should be performed; this enforcement of normative gendered behaviour is known as gender essentialism (DePalma, 2013, p. 2; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). It doesn't take much deviation from these norms for pupils to be singled out, bullied, or even being labelled as a bully themselves, (e.g., the notion of a confrontational, non-feminine girl) (DePalma, 2013; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). Heteronormative gender performances are often played off as natural by school staff; which often results in a lack of sanction for boys' violent behaviour (Ringrose & Renold, 2010). This facilitates bullying cultures which are damaging for all pupils and may even be resulting in increasing incidences of sexual coercion and intimate partner violence in teenagers (Abbott et al., 2021; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). This violence is disguised under the notion of masculinity and is supportive in upholding a patriarchal society that requires emphasised femininity to keep women subordinated in society (Abbott et al., 2021; McCormack, 2021). This was supported by Duncan & Owens (2011) who discuss the perceived attributes of popularity among teenage girls. The performance of high femininity was seen as attractive to boys, and consequently marked as the most important factor related to popularity; in fact, they found that to be a lesbian was seen as synonymous with unpopularity (Duncan & Owens, 2011). These heteronormative assumptions are even drawn upon by young people to rationalise coercive behaviours through notions of masculinity and femininity; what it means to be a strong man or a passive, vulnerable girl (Abbott et al., 2021). These concerning bullying and coercive norms are justified by heteronormativity and there is thus a need to for staff to support CYP to critically examine constructs of sexuality and accompanying gender norms to tackle this (Abbott et al., 2021).

Practices of masculinity also shape digital sexual image exchange, with teen girls internally accepting homosocial masculinity practices as normal and therefore do not define receiving unsolicited nude pictures from boys as abusive or harassing (Ringrose,

Regehr & Whitehead, 2022). These homosocial masculinity structures mean there is worse sexual stigma for girls, being classed a 'slag' or 'slut' if nudes are leaked and shared, whereas for boys this is couched in humour (Ringrose et al., 2022, p. 257). This is reinforced by pornography acting as a cultural construction that privileges male sexual desire and helps embed narratives of norms surrounding appropriate masculinity and femininity that are already pressurised within school-based sexual cultures (Setty, 2022).

There has been a recent push within early years settings to create more balanced work forces (hiring more men) to ensure young children are exposed to both men and women in nurturing roles (Warin, 2017). This appears to be based upon heteronormative ideals of a nuclear family and suggests the value of having both masculine and feminine contributions in the care and education of young children. Warin (2017) argues that in doing this early year's settings may be inadvertently supporting gender essentialism and reinforcing gender differences. Instead, a move towards gender flexibility amongst staff is suggested, where the performance of gender is modelled by staff and includes incorporating ideas about the resources that young children may be encouraged to play with. There is a need to develop a gender-conscious pedagogy here and ensure staff are trained to respond sensitively to the various ways in which CYP express their gender and be able to recognise the subtle ways traditional gender roles and norms can persist (Warin, 2017). This type of approach may go someone to disrupting the creation of gender norms within educational settings.

3.2 Schools as heteronormative institutions

Everyday school practices can be seen to perpetuate heteronormativity and the imposition of gender binaries, from uniform policies, gendered toilets, lack of LGBTQ+ inclusivity within the curriculum, and the isolated use of the third-person singular pronouns 'he' and 'she' which attest to the fixed view of gender (Bollas, 2021; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Markland, et al., 2022; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). Perhaps due to ideas of childhood innocence, primary schools are seen as particularly

heteronormative settings, where the norms of gender and heterosexuality are continually maintained (Atkinson, 2021; Carlile, 2020). In this way the replication of heteronormativity causes LGBTQ+ identities to be absent or othered (Bragg et al., 2016; Llewellyn, 2022).

If teachers do not challenge heteronormative practices, they may inadvertently encourage discriminatory behaviour in pupils and contribute towards the negative experiences of trans CYP by maintaining an environment that reinforces traditional gender norms (Bollas, 2021; Read, Sargeant & Wright, 2020). Through the systemic influence of heteronormativity, the actions and gender performances of individuals are policed and regulated to ensure they act as 'proper girls' and 'proper boys' (DePalma, 2013; McCormack & Anderson, 2010; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). The existence of trans people highlights the division between physical sex and gender identity and therefore acts as a threat to these heteronormative, conservative and essentialist beliefs (Read et al., 2020). This has implications for the way in which members of the LGBTQ+ community are treated, and heteronormative cultures serve to facilitate gender inequality, homophobia, and transphobia (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Hall, 2020; Read et al., 2020). This is exacerbated through teachers' reluctance to intervene with incidences of homophobic bullying or challenge the gendered and heterosexist content within the curriculum (Abbott et al., 2021); resulting in heteronormativity, homophobia and transphobia continuing to be pervasive in all types of schools in the UK (Sauntson & Simpson, 2011; Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b). Even when HBT bullying is tackled, there remains a tendency in schools for teachers to act reactively to the individual perpetuating the bullying, rather than tackling the heteronormative culture within the school which causes the bullying to occur (Harris, Wilson-Daily & Fuller, 2021).

3.2.1 Toilets

Some schools, to varying degrees, have taken on some aspects of LGBTQ+ inclusion, leading to teachers struggling to navigate this in the stubbornly heteronormative environment of the school (Llewelyn, 2022). To illustrate, gendered toilets continue to

highlight that queer bodies are out of place, especially those who are trans or intersex (Slater et al., 2018). To add, although within the institutional space of the classroom children understand that acceptance of gender and sexuality is expected, this does not always translate into unregulated spaces (Hall, 2020). Hall's research highlighted that year four boys continue to illustrate heteronormative masculinity within the bathroom space, illustrating that children are capable of policing heteronormativity though the continuation of homophobic language when teachers are not around (Hall, 2020). The research suggests that true disruption of heteronormative ideals (such as critical reconsideration of the signage on toilet doors) is needed in these spaces so they do not actively promote categories of gender; disrupting heteronormativity in this way is required to challenge HBT discrimination (Hall, 2020; Slater et al., 2018).

3.2.2 Physical Education

Physical education (PE) is distinctive in its ability to perpetuate gender norms as it is a subject where the norms of appropriate masculinity and femininity are amplified, with many sports often divided by gender (Drury, Stride, Firth & Fitzgerald, 2022; Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019). This, like gendered toilet spaces, can result in queer CYP feeling alienated as they are often forced to change away from the rest of the class, solidifying their difference and exclusion from the group (Formby, 2015). It was reported that PE teachers feel they require training that is tailored to the specific problems that arise in PE, as knowledge among teachers is limited and largely relies upon personal experiences of having had to respond to a trans CYP in their class (Drury et al., 2022). This variety of experience means PE teachers may be left feeling ill-equipped to facilitate safe and inclusive environments for queer CYP, which contributes to them not attending PE (Drury et al., 2022; Formby, 2015). The participants in Drury et al.'s (2022) study did express a willingness to develop their knowledge in this area (this may not be representative of all teachers as they volunteered to participate, so may already have an invested interest in this area) and they suggest that this should include the voices of trans CYP as central to any changes made (Drury et al., 2022). Their suggestion to create more inclusive practices by thinking beyond the binary when it

comes to PE classes, sports, and uniforms, would not only be beneficial for trans CYP, but all CYP who feel alienated in PE (Drury et al., 2022).

3.3 The role of religion

LGBTQ+ issues are unique among equalities issues in being perceived as being against somebody's religious beliefs and historically this had substantial influence over the rights of LGBTQ+ people (DePalma & Jennett; 2010; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). Although conservative, religious discourses no longer have authority to shape legal frameworks, like they have historically (e.g., Section 28), religious interests have helped maintain an educational landscape where CYP continue to face discrepancies in their access to teaching and discussion about LGBTQ+ issues (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). The research states this may be more prevalent in parts of the UK with increased level of religiosity; with Northern Ireland (NI) highlighted as having particularly high levels of religiosity (60.6% compared to 38.2% in the rest of the UK) (Wilkinson, 2021). Consequently, research suggests the church continues to have a stronger influence over education systems in NI (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). McBride & Schubotz (2017) highlighted a 'Christian moral order' negatively impacts the LGBTQ+ community in NI schools, with HBT abuse towards pupils normalised, and slurs reportedly used by teachers. This results in worse educational experiences, poorer mental health and youth even sharing that they want to leave NI and never return (Schubotz & O'Hara, 2011). The disruption of heteronormativity in a country where nationality and religion as regarded so highly may therefore be challenging, confounded by the continued electoral success of religiously conservative parties who may be at odds with modern equality legislation (such as that seen in other parts of the UK, e.g., The Equality Act) (McBride & Schubotz, 2017; Schubotz & O'Hara, 2011). This is of course, just one position, with one author contributing to two of the studies mentioned here. Further work to explore the impact of religiosity in NI is required to gain a more holistic and updated view of the state of play in NI regarding heteronormativity in schools.

These challenges are not unique to NI, with several leaders of Britain's major faiths criticising the redefinition of marriage to include same sex couples, stating that teachers, who for religious reasons opposed to redefinition of marriage, were not adequately protected (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). This notion is strengthened by many faiths framing children as innocent and in need of protection from the existence of sexuality, with some religious staff members remaining hesitant about the appropriateness of delivering LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculums (Carlile, 2020). There remains a fear of censorship from local religious culture in some schools serving religious communities which serves as a barrier to teachers' willingness to establish LGBTQ+ inclusive initiatives (Carlile, 2020; Schubotz & O'Hara, 2011). This was illustrated by Page & Yip (2012) who interviewed religious youth about their retrospective school experiences. They highlighted that religious schools were not perceived as welcoming, with staff and peer groups reinforcing a strongly heteronormative culture. Participants stated they remembered thinking it was wrong to be gay and reported incidences of bullying (Page & Yip, 2012). Participants were reflecting retrospectively, and it should be noted that due to the age of some of the participants, they would've have been in school before the introduction of the Equality Act (2010); however, recent research has found similar results. Bragg et al., (2018) illustrated that some CYP display strong anti-trans and anti-gay positions on account of their religion, with one child in their study sharing: "I know for a fact, in my religion, the most wrongest thing you can do is either be gay or be something that God didn't choose for you, because God doesn't make mistakes" (Bragg et al., 2018, p. 424).

Strong anti-LGBTQ+ views are seen most extremely among heteroactivist groups, who often associate themselves with Christian moral order. The ideologies espoused by such groups is that of the superiority of monogamous, binary cis-gendered, coupled marriages, as best for children and society, thus claiming a direct opposition to the inclusion of LGBTQ+ equalities in schools (Nash & Browne, 2021). Research suggests such groups 'exploit' notions of 'parental rights' to actively contest the inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues and support of trans children in schools. Nash & Browne (2021) use the example of the Rowe family and their opposition to the presence of a trans child in their child's class to illustrate the link between religion and heteroactivism, as the

family were represented by the Christian Legal Centre, a heteroactivist organisation that offers support with legal challenges and policy advocacy.

Despite the above, religious participants in Bragg et al.'s study (2018) spoke of an inner turmoil between the modern beliefs they believed to be right, and what their more conservative, religious backgrounds were telling them (Bragg et al., 2018). In fact, faith groups are often internally more pluralistic and inclusive than outsiders realise, or give credit for (Carlile, 2020). Resultantly, constructive collaborations between faith communities, families and schools are possible and can act as a facilitator to LGBTQ+ inclusive education and challenging the narrative of religious spaces as wholly negative spaces for queer CYP (Carlile, 2020; Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019). Teachers and staff in Carlile's (2020) study considered a strong commitment to respecting others as rooted in their religious practice and were committed to the creation of an LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum and ensuring they knew the correct vocabulary to use in lessons (Carlile, 2020). Queer, religious youth in Taylor & Cuthbert's (2019) confirm this, reflecting on their positive experience in their faith schools due to their non-discriminatory ethos. This is supported by McCormack (2012) in their 4-month ethnographic study in a religious sixth form college. Through interviews and observation with 22 students, they argue that there is a marked decrease in homophobia present in religious education settings (McCormack, 2012). Although this seems a compelling argument, the research only draws on evidence from 4 of 22 interviews, and this researcher has to wonder if a positivity bias may have been at play in the evidence presented. Despite this, it seems clear that queer youth's experiences are individual, regardless of whether they attend a faith, or non-religious, school (Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019). Positioning religious schools as problem sites for queer youth is problematic and overlooks the fact that religion can be a source of support, and act as a refuge from bullying (Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019). Instead, a more useful focus would be on wider school cultures and disrupting the systemic issue of heteronormativity that exists in all school, regardless of faith status (McCormack, 2012; Taylor & Cuthbert, 2019).

3.4 Childhood innocence

The rhetoric surrounding historical legislation, like Section 28, has left a legacy in framing homosexuality, and wider LGBTQ+ issues, as dangerous for children (Llewellyn, 2022). Childhood is framed as an innocent state, with young children, particularly girls, couched in a protectionist discourse of vulnerability (Llewellyn, 2022; Wilkinson, 2021). The implicit link between LGBTQ+ people and sex is often related to the stereotypical view of the 'promiscuous gay lifestyle' (Carlile, 2020). This leaves staff often unable to detach the idea of LGBTQ+ issues form the idea of an adult sexual relationship (Carlile, 2020; Llewellyn, 2022). As a result, LGBTQ+ people are viewed as a threat to childhood innocence, with students in need of protection from sexuality, leaving teachers fearful of teaching gender and sexuality, particularly to younger ages (Bowskill, 2017; Llewellyn, 2022). Despite assumptions that we might be living in a more tolerant society, these protectionist discourses, and the opposition to LGBTQ+ inclusion in schools appears to be rising; seen famously in Birmingham in 2019 when parents took to the street in protest, wielding signs with phrases like 'let kids be kids' (Llewellyn, 2022). This narrative of childhood innocence and protection is perhaps the cause of heteronormativity being particularly pertinent within early years and primary school settings (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019).

As stated above the positioning of LGBTQ+ issues as 'adult' clashes with the idea of childhood innocence, feeding into teacher reluctance to use LGBTQ+ inclusive materials, due to the assumption that they are not relevant to the children's experiences (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Llewellyn, 2022). As a result, teachers have a harder time addressing sexualities equality when compared with other equalities areas, such as racism, due to this construction of non-heterosexuality as hypersexual (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). This construction of children as both asexual and heterosexual may also be dictating how LGBTQ+ teachers present themselves, feeling pressure to present as asexual and heterosexual to protect childhood innocence and maintain the heterosexual order (Llewellyn, 2022). The juxtaposition of childhood innocence, and 'adult' LGBTQ+ issues, leaving teachers fearful in this area is likely confounded by the fear of parental backlash, caused by heteroactivist parent groups (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Nash & Browne, 2021). Some such groups argue that the promotion of inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues in the curriculum

quantifies bullying and indoctrination of children that will cause gender confusion (Nash & Browne, 2021). Groups such as these make claims about parental rights to determine their child's education and see school spaces as in need of protection from different sexual and gendered lives; making teachers more likely to shy away from tackling homophobia and heteronormativity in their settings (Formby, 2015; Nash & Browne, 2021).

Despite the construction of children as asexual and naïve, especially in early years and primary school settings, research states that they can pick up stereotypical understandings of sexuality and gender from a very young age (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). Children as young as three can use homophobic language, such as 'gay' as an insult, with a plethora of different meanings attached to the word (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). One participant in McCormack's (2012) research described waiting until the age of 15 to come out, stating that they experienced less homophobia as a result, suggesting the homophobic attitudes are more prevalent among younger children. Perhaps it is possible that children are not as naïve as many believe, in fact in Bragg et al.'s study one participant described knowing at age five that "gender could mean 'more than boy, girl, male, female'" (Bragg et al., 2018, p. 426).

Although there seems to be a shift in this area, with increasing numbers of honest and open practitioners who are able to share their LGBTQ+ identities with their pupils in an authentic way, further work is needed (Llewellyn, 2022) (the privileged position of the participants in this study should be noted, most were white, English and cisgender, most also fit the homonormative narrative; there is therefore more diverse experiences that should be explored). Perhaps a shift away from positioning children as naïve and without agency and toward positioning them as individuals and active citizens is required (Llewellyn, 2022). CYP are working hard to educate themselves on gender identity and expression, and increasing their cultural awareness (Bragg et al., 2018). They therefore require schooling that reflects their expanded vocabularies of gender, by being inclusive of important social justice issues (Bragg et al., 2018; Llewellyn, 2022). The narrative of viewing children as too young to learn about LGBTQ+

people was criticised by teachers in Llewellyn's (2022) study who claimed that young children were open minded and often underwhelmed by LGBTQ+ people, and removal of this inclusion from the curriculum only serves to privilege the normative, nuclear family (Llewellyn, 2022). Research has found that primary-aged children are, in fact, able to sensibly and respectfully talk about LGBTQ+ issues, as well as showing an ability to think critically and creatively about LGBTQ+ inclusion and challenging heteronormativity (Carlile, 2020).

3.5 Relationships and sexuality education (RSE)

Section 28 continues to have an insidious influence over education, perpetuating uncertainty in many teachers about what they can and cannot include in their RSE teaching due to a fear of being seen to 'promote' homosexuality (Abbott et al., 2015; Carlile, 2020; Local Government Act, 1988). Since the introduction of Section 28, sex education has largely focused on reinforcing acceptable sexuality as sex within marriage, and trying to address public health concerns, like the HIV/AIDS crisis and teenage pregnancy (Abbott et al., 2015; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). This is likely a result of sex education historically only being statutory as part of the science curriculum, naturally leading to a focus on biology and health (Abbott et al., 2015). This biological focus results in a focus on heterosexual sex and procreation, with the use of highly gendered and heteronormative language (Abbott et al., 2015; Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016). This was supported by Wilkinson (2021) who analysed official government circulars, legislative texts and RSE policy guidance distributed to schools in Northern Ireland (NI). Their work highlighted the prioritisation of compulsory heteronormativity and the erasure of non-binary persons within the RSE curriculum, with only one in five schools covering LGBTQ+ issues in RSE (Wilkinson, 2021). The heteronormative and highly gendered nature of RSE also reinforces socially constructed gender roles which contribute to the oppression of girls and result in girls positioning sex as risky (Sundaram & Sauntson, 2016; Wilkinson, 2021). This narrative also serves to mark heterosexuality as the norm, leaving LGBTQ+ pupils with little, to no, knowledge that reflects their experience (Abbott et al., 2015). The LGBTQ+ charity Stonewall state this in their school reports which highlighted that only 13% of UK

pupils are taught about healthy relationships between same sex couples (Stonewall 2017a). This narrative feeds into the rhetoric that LGBTQ+ pupils are isolated cases and outside of the remit of mainstream RSE provision, which results in LGBTQ+ pupils viewing their sexual identity negatively (Abbott et al., 2015), (it should be noted that only two out of eight participants were included in this analysis and caution should be taken with the results as they may be influenced by a negativity bias).

Sex education should be an important place for learning about sex and sexual health, but young people continue to feel unprepared to positive relationships and good sexual health (Patterson et al., 2020). It appears that a lack of progress continues to result in an insidiously heteronormativity RSE curriculum, with queer young people feeling dissatisfied with the education they receive (Gillespie, Armstrong & Ingham, 2022; Patterson et al., 2020). As a result, LGBTQ+ CYP are left unprepared for first sex and are often forced to learn from more experienced sexual partners (Gillespie et al., 2022; Read et al., 2020). This is reflected in many other studies highlighting that the inadequate nature of RSE leads to queer pupils being forced to learn through other means, such as online forums, underground exploration, and pornography (Bragg et al., 2018; Setty, 2022; Sill, 2022). During Setty's (2022) work as an embedded researcher in a school, they discovered that pornography acts as a means of reproducing gendered, heteronormative constructions of sex and sexuality among CYP. Pornography was viewed as normal and typical for boys to view, but unusual for girls. It should be noted that Setty's (2022) research took place in an independent boarding school, where performances of homosociality may have been increased due to the close environment in which the boys lived; further research would be needed to determine the effect of this environment. However, these findings were supported by Sill (2022) who used focus groups to explore the retrospective accounts of undergraduate students' experiences of RSE, and how this met their needs as LGBTQ+ individuals. Their findings highlighted the heteronormativity at play within the RSE curriculum leads LGBTQ+ students to seek out alternative forms of sex education, such as pornography (Sill, 2022) (although a possibility of recall bias should be considered, all participants were aged 18-21 at the time of interview, so had not been out of secondary education for that long). Although pornography may act as a valuable

source of information, misinformation can also be present which can lead to internalised shame and self-doubt about sex (Setty, 2022; Sill, 2022). Educators could therefore consider including pornography within RSE curriculums so pupils can critically discuss it and know how to access ethical pornography (Setty, 2022).

Despite the above, changes to the way RSE is delivered are being made. From 2020 RSE was made compulsory in England; Wales have also introduced statutory, inclusive RSE curriculum, and in Scotland LGBTQ+ inclusion is seen more broadly across the curriculum (Llewellyn, 2022; Welsh Government, 2021). Despite the compulsory nature of the new curriculums, reports suggest that variation still exists within and between schools, with some offering little to no positive messaging about the LGBTQ+ community (Llewellyn, 2022). There is therefore a need for RSE educators to explore and critically examine constructs of sexuality and accompanying gender norms with young people. It is through challenging gender stereotypes and heterosexist attitudes that young people can develop healthy relationships (Abbott et al., 2021). As mentioned above, heteronormativity plays a role in normalising coercive control; helping pupils to dismantle these norms as part of their RSE education may support them in recognising and challenging coercive behaviours to develop healthy relationships (Abbott et al., 2021). RSE educators could also consider how they can work with the wider staff team to ensure LGBTQ+ content is not exclusive to RSE lessons, as this draws unnecessary pathologizing and sexualising of LGBTQ+ people (Carlile, 2020).

3.6 The wider curriculum

As highlighted above, keeping LGBTQ+ content exclusive to RSE is problematic, and when LGBTQ+ issues are discussed in the wider curriculum there is a tendency for this to be as part of 'diversity' or 'anti-bullying' weeks to tackle homophobia (Abbott et al., 2015; Carlile, 2020). Non-heterosexual lives continue to be marginalised across all curriculum subjects and CYP are exposed to very different access to LGBTQ+ inclusive teaching due to the discretion schools have about what they teach (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). Moreover, some teachers perceive the curriculum as so rigid that they

could not adapt their work to become more LGBTQ+ inclusive, even if they wanted to (Markland et al., 2022). This results in CYP drawing on social media, online spaces, and public figures to gain information about LGBTQ+ issues and to learn the language with which to describe and express their gender identity away from the fixed binary (Bragg et al., 2018). This is unfortunate when it is considered that when LGBTQ+ issues are included in the curriculum, pupils are less likely to experience HBT bullying, are more likely to be happy in school and see their school as a welcoming place (Saunton & Simpson, 2011; Stonewall, 2017a).

The curriculum seems to privilege hegemonic gender roles through the lack of LGBTQ+ inclusivity in literary texts (Bowskill, 2017; Gray, 2021). Despite teachers feeling as though progress is being made with regards to inclusivity, LGBTQ+ students do not see themselves reflected in learning materials, highlighting a disconnect between teachers' and students' perceptions of curriculum integration (Bollas, 2021; Gray, 2021). By not increasing inclusivity in literary texts pupils may not have access to the language needed for the purposes required to them (Bollas, 2021). Furthermore, teachers may inadvertently be reinforcing gender roles, norms and stereotypes and even encouraging discriminatory behaviour (Bollas, 2021; Bowskill, 2017). The disconnect between staff and students' perceptions of inclusivity may be due to a reliance on a homonormative approach to framing LGBTQ+ people, which is often a starting point from which teachers develop their inclusive teaching practice (Carlile, 2020). This approach offers teachers a feeling of safety, however the issue lies in the fact that it opposes the celebration of diversity, and attempts to normalise any difference seen (Carlile, 2020). This runs the risk of espousing that LGBTQ+ individuals are only accepted is they adhere to the core social principle of monogamy and family life (Bollas, 2021; Carlile, 2020).

To avoid a curriculum that reinforces the notion of heteronormativity, research suggests that LGBTQ+ issues be weaved throughout the curriculum through the creation of a proactive sexualities' pedagogy (Atkinson, 2021; Carlile, 2020; Formby, 2015). Research states that this is supportive in creating a school community that is inclusive and is essential to counter institutional heteronormativity (Atkinson, 2021;

Robinson, 2010). In fact, the new RSE code set forth by Welsh Government advocates the need for the new RSE curriculum to be embedded across all curriculum subjects and throughout the school environment as part of an inclusive whole school approach (Robinson, 2010; Welsh Government, 2021). This is a positive step in the right direction and research tells us that children can discuss these issues sensitively from primary school (Carlile, 2020). This embrace of LGBTQ+ discussion across the curriculum will help avoid pupils viewing homosexuality as "*un*acceptable, *un*speakable, and *un*intelligible", and prevent pupils from inferring that their teachers' silence on LGBTQ+ matters, equals their disapproval (Atkinson, 2021, p. 464).

Some researchers go further and suggests a 'queering' or 'trans-ing' of the curriculum is required to truly challenge institutional heteronormativity within schools (DePalma, 2013; Hall, 2020; Millett, 2019). This would go beyond the introduction of inclusive literary texts and would require teachers to raise questions about sex and gender and open a space to discuss (hetero)sexism (DePalma, 2013; Hall, 2020). This would require the questioning of the very terms 'girl' and 'boy' and challenge the use of categories and norms at a basic level, allowing them to be questioned, dismantled, and reimagined in new and creative ways (DePalma, 2013; Hall, 2020). Millett (2019) argues that art may be a helpful place to start in the processing of queering the curriculum as it is a place where it is already socially acceptable to express oneself and explore a sense of identity that may not be possible in other subjects (Addison, 2012; Millet, 2019). The abstract nature of art lends itself to dissolving categories of gender and sexuality and allowing students a space in which they might question dominant heteronormative discourses (Addison, 2012; Millett, 2019). Queering in this way has the potential to go beyond tolerance to towards developing inclusive discourses and may have the power to reduce gender-based inequity and violence by challenging the effects of (cis)sexism and gender normativity which appear to be currently influencing CYP within schools in the UK (Addison, 2012; DePalma, 2013).

3.7 Loopholes

Despite the steps toward inclusivity taken by some schools and Government agencies listed above, there are still issues present. Schools have discretion in the way they approach RSE and LGBTQ+ content in all areas of the UK, leaving it open to influence of local factors such as community and parental pressures (Abbott et al., 2015; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). In England, the Department for Education released statutory guidance for schools on RSE in 2019; this guidance is vague regarding the delivery of the new curriculum and is open to be interpreted by schools in a variety of ways (Abbott et al., 2021; Department for Education, 2019). Although, the guidance briefly states that pupils should be taught about LGBTQ+ issues at a time when the school feels this is appropriate, "schools are free to determine how they do this" (Department for Education, 2019, p. 15). The case is similar in Wales, where although there are several references to LGBTQ+ inclusivity through the RSE code, flexibility is afforded to schools in how they design their RSE curriculum, leaving it open to differing interpretations (Welsh Government, 2021). CYP therefore continue to be exposed to different access to teaching on LGBTQ+ issues, due to local factors and parental pressures (Abbott et al., 2015; Vanderbilt & Johnson, 2015). This can lead to lack of promotion of LGBTQ+ equality, or even an acknowledgement of same sex relationships; research suggests this is particularly true in Northern Ireland where the approach towards RSE is non-prescriptive, with schools offered guidance, which is not statutory (Vanderbilt & Johnson, 2015; Wilkinson, 2021). This flexibility allows schools to teach RSE in accordance with their school's ethos and acts as a loophole for the inclusion of LGBTQ+ issues and may act to suppress CYP's identity formation in their formative years (Wilkinson, 2021).

The variety in pupil experience may also be confounded by the fact that RSE is not regulated by Ofsted in England, or Estyn in Wales (to the knowledge of this researcher) (Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015); currently Ofsted only have a duty in ensuring that schools prevent homophobic bullying (Hall, 2020). This is reinforced by the parental pressures to exclude LGBTQ+ topics within RSE (even when the material discussed is not sexually explicit), with some religious and conversative groups encouraging parents to exercise their right to withdraw their child (under the age of 15) from sex education (Page & Yip, 2012; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). Although the right for

parents to withdraw their pupils from RSE has been removed in Wales, following the implementation of the new curriculum, parents in England may still request that their child be excused from RSE (Department for Education, 2019). Government policies and guidance therefore need to do more to ensure that loopholes do not result in inequity of exposure to LGBTQ+ content, both between and within schools. Although the new RSE code for Wales is particularly inclusive, Governments need to do more to tackle heteronormative and exclusionary policies, that continue to 'other' LGBTQ+ pupils, and result in trans pupils being forced to use 'dead names' on exam paperwork and other legal documents, such as registers (McCormack, 2012; Welsh Government, 2021). The research here mentioned therefore suggests that if loopholes continue to exist within Government policy and guidance, CYP will continue to be influenced (to varying degrees) by heteronormativity in schools that privileges those who are straight and/or cisgender.

3.8 Victim discourse

The systemic heteronormative ethos that exists in schools is inexplicably linked to HBTH bullying, which is recognised to begin in primary school (Carlile, 2020; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). Everything from the curriculum, to policies, and gendered PE lessons and toilets, queer pupils face heteronormativity which leaves them unable to be authentically themselves (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). This is particularly true for gender non-confirming CYP who may need to break uniform rules to be authentically themselves, leaving them open to sanctions, or bullying; this can put their emotional wellbeing at risk (Bowskill, 2017; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). This does not just affect LGBTQ+ identifying people, but any CYP who does not conform to gendered or societal expectations and norms (Formby, 2015). Unfortunately, LGBTQ+ CYP continue to face unacceptably high levels of HBTH bullying, leaving them with reduced feelings of safety in school, leading to poorer academic outcomes and school avoidance (Markland et al., 2022; Stonewall, 2017a). Those experiencing bullying, including physical abuse, are at much higher risk of negative mental health implications; this includes depression anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), self-herm, suicidal ideation, and even suicide (Bowskill, 2017; Formby, 2015; Stonewall, 2017a; Yavuz, 2016).

The focus on HBTH bullying by charities like Stonewall has been used to seek change and this rhetoric could be viewed as a strategic way for teachers to begin including LGBTQ+ inclusivity into their curriculum (Carlile, 2020; Formby, 2015; Stonewall, 2017a). However, representation of the LGBTQ+ community through this narrative alone serves to pathologize, and does not create inclusive school environments, which may even result in LGBTQ+ CYP being scared to come out, our waiting until they are older (Formby, 2015; Markland et al., 2022; McCormack, 2012). Although LGBTQ+ charities have good intentions and do fantastic work in supporting queer CYP, their victim discourse narrative serves to reinforce heteronormativity (Millet, 2019). Furthermore, anti-bullying policies and practices may be leading to (albeit inadvertently) the implicit message that all LGBTQ+ CYP are at risk and facing adversity (Formby, 2015). Schools should take caution in the assumption that all LGBTQ+ CYP will suffer with their emotional wellbeing and should attempt to resist the prevailing discourses that label LGBTQ+ CYP as victims, who are powerless and need to be rescued (DePalma, 2013; Bowskill, 2017). Although there should be an acknowledgement that HBTH bullying does take place in schools, with support available for those effected, policies could consider moving away from overstating the risk agenda associated with LGBTQ+ CYP as this only serves to reinforce that they are different form their heterosexual, cisgender, peers, causing them to expect negative, bullying reactions when they come out (Formby, 2015; Robinson, 2010). Instead, school policies could shift towards disrupting the heteronormativity that exists in schools and critically consider how their institution constructs and responds to LGBTQ+ people (Formby, 2015; Millet, 2019). Thought could also be given to how schools support LGBTQ+ CYP, if they want it, without suggesting or assuming, that all LGBTQ+ CYP need support because of them identifying as LGBTQ+ (Formby, 2015).

To add, despite high incidences of HBTH in schools, there remains a tendency for teachers to act reactively to the actions of the individual perpetrating the bullying, rather than acknowledging the culture of heteronormativity that causes it to occur (Hall, 2020; Harris et al., 2021). In this way HBTH bullying continues to be viewed as individualised problem that pathologizes LGBTQ+ pupils (Carlile, 2020; DePalma &

Atkinson, 2010). Heteronormative cultures are upheld in schools through HBTH bullying, where LGBTQ+ pupils may be perceived as a threat to the in-group status of the heteronormative in-group; bullies may therefore be considered as protectors of the (hetero)normative order (Addison, 2012; Formby, 2015; Read et al., 2020). The focus on bullying discourses that we see in schools ignores the systemic influence of heteronormativity caused by gender and sexuality norms (Abbot et al., 2015; Llewellyn, 2022; Hall, 2020). Analysing and attempting to dismantle the powerful influence of heteronormativity could be a more helpful focus for the anti-bullying rhetoric that surrounds the LGBTQ+ community in schools to prevent LGBTQ+ pupils being pathologized and labelled as 'at risk' (Addison, 2012; Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Formby, 2015).

3.9 Progress?

Since the revocation of Section 28 there have been some advances in LGBTQ+ inclusive legislation which has impacted schools, such as the Equality Act and changes to the RSE curriculum in England and Wales (Department for Education, 2014; Department for Education, 2019; Johnson, 2022; UK Government, 2010; Welsh Government, 2021). With this seems a growing awareness of gender and sexuality diversity within schools and the influence that heteronormativity can play (Atkinson, 2021; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). As such, some researchers state it is now possible for LGBTQ+ pupils to have positive school experiences because incidences of homophobia are 'dying out' (McCormack & Anderson, 2010; McCormack, 2012; Robinson, 2010). McCormack & Anderson's (2010) ethnographic research afforded them access to a participant pool of openly gay sixth form students who claimed that increasing numbers of boys had pro-gay attitudes. Furthermore, heterosexual boys were able to be physically tactile and emotionally intimate with other boys without being 'homosexualized' by their peers for these behaviours (McCormack & Anderson, 2010). This suggests progression in the way heterosexual boys are required to express their masculine identity, and no longer need to act in aggressive, homophobic, and misogynistic ways to maintain homosocial masculinity (it should be noted that the authors focused on overt displays of homophobia in their research; it would be of interest in further research to determine

if incidences of covert homophobia have also decreased in the same way). Since this report was published, more contemporary views have been documented among secondary school pupils, who described conservative views as old fashioned, with participants more accepting of differences of gender and sexuality (Bragg et al., 2018). Bragg et al.'s (2018) participants (aged 12-14 years) labelled today's society as more accepting, and it was suggested that staff need to learn from the progressive nature of their pupils by keeping pace with CYP's sites for learning about LGBTQ+ issues.

Caution should be taken in assuming that enough progress has been made, and schools need to do little more in this area. Even following the introduction of the Equality Act (2010), as stated above, LGBTQ+ pupils still face HTBH bulling and abuse in schools at a disproportionate rate (McBride & Schubotz, 2017; Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall, 2017b). Cultural factors may also play a role in stunting the progression of inclusivity in schools, for example, despite strong equality legislation in NI, it is reported that trans youth in NI are not treated equally in education settings, with research suggesting this is due to the conservative Christian values in the country (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). Scottish participants from different generations also reported a lack of progress in the usefulness of the RSE and how it prepared them for sexual experiences and positive relationships (Patterson et al., 2020). However, it should be noted that research in Scotland, Wales and NI was limited in this area. Further research examining cultural differences within the UK would therefore be useful in exploring this factor in more depth. The limited research that does exist however suggested that even in inclusive school cultures, where an apparent absence of homophobia is reported, CYP continue to privilege heterosexuality (McBride & Schubotz, 2017; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). Schools therefore need to examine the processes of heteronormativity and develop counter-heteronormative interventions to overcome this issue (McBride & Schubotz, 2017; McCormack & Anderson, 2010). Disrupting heteronormativity through the completion of LGBTQ+ inclusive work, has the potential for great positive impacts, not only for LGBTQ+ pupils, but all pupils in education settings (Johnson, 2022).

3.10 Role of the Educational Psychologist (EP)

It seems that there is a growing need for guidance for educational professionals on how best to support LGBTQ+ CYP people in our schools (Bowskill, 2017). EPs may be well placed in this regard with their role in supporting schools and CYP at the individual/family, whole school, and the wider systemic levels of the local authority (LA) (Bowskill, 2019; Robinson, 2010; Yavuz, 2016). As EPs are already often asked to support CYP directly, or indirectly, with issues of bullying, inclusion and equality of opportunity, there is arguably a role for them in supporting schools to develop more inclusive school environments through the disruption of heteronormativity (Charlton, 2020; Robinson, 2010). As Court (2019) states, EPs already have the 'tools' required, they just need to think about how they can apply them in new ways to assist schools in supporting the LGBTQ+ population more effectively. For example, EPs could utilise their social constructivist tools in understanding the complexities of sexual diversity and gender identity (Marks, 2012). This section explores how EPs may support this area at the individual/family, school, and wider systemic levels of their work.

3.10.1 The individual/family level

EPs may be well placed to support LGBTQ+ pupils who are struggling with the consequences of heteronormativity as they offer support in a non-judgmental way and are accepting of diversity (Robinson, 2010). There is also potentially a role in supporting parents, carers, and families, as LGBTQ+ CYP who feel supported by their families are more likely to have better mental health outcomes (Yavuz, 2016). At the individual level there needs to be an individualised approach for CYP, and EPs should be aware of resources, services, and charities that they can use, or signpost CYP to (Bowskill, 2017; Robinson, 2010). Use of solution focused methods may also be supportive at this level in helping CYP explore their school experiences associated to gender and sexuality, consider what has been useful, and work with schools to explore how these could be built upon (Robinson, 2010). However, some researchers argue that the focus of the EP should be on the social systems around the CYP, rather than with the CYP themselves, and there should be little need for the EP to work at the

individual level unless the CYP's voice is not being heard by school staff and the EP is required as an advocate (Bowskill, 2017; Yavuz, 2016).

3.10.2 The school level

As mentioned above, EPs are well placed to support schools in developing ways of working with the systems around a CYP (Charlton, 2020). EPs could support schools in creating systemic shifts towards the development of inclusive policies, the creation of LGBTQ+ safe places and inclusive curriculums (Markland et al., 2022). This may be beyond the scope of teachers, and the support of external professionals could be utilised to help engage in some of the complexities of this work (Court, 2019; Markland et al., 2022). The research explored above suggests that school staff may be anxious in confronting LGBTQ+ issues, especially if they have not encountered them before; EPs could support here by bringing the most recent research and recommendations (Yavuz, 2016). Research suggests that teachers are willing to develop their knowledge to better support LGBTQ+ CYP and it is important that they feel comfortable with LGBTQ+ topics to ensure pupils feel confident in their teachers' competence in this area (Drury et al., 2022; Sill 2022). There is therefore potential for EPs, or other professionals, to play a crucial role in training here, with research suggesting that some teachers have never received any information on LGBTQ+ issues, such as gender identity (Formby, 2015; Sill, 2022). EPs could also be supportive in helping practitioners with continuing their professional development in developing a pedagogy that is more gender aware by challenging classroom practices such as grouping pupils into 'boys' and 'girls' (Bragg et al., 2018; Warin, 2017; Yavuz, 2016).

For the implementation of such training to be a success, it is important that a whole school approach is taken to educating staff to identify strategies for inclusion and create welcoming school environments (Drury et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022; Sill, 2022). EPs could support here by ensuring that school policies are inclusive by challenging schools to think beyond the gender binary when it comes to traditionally gendered things such as uniforms, changing facilities, and sporting activities (Drury et al., 2022). EPs might also support school to disrupt heteronormativity through the creation of

gender fluid classrooms (Yavuz, 2016). By supporting schools to make inclusive policy changes that challenge heteronormativity in this way, schools will be giving a message of acceptance and non-judgement, ensuring that pupils feel empowered to ask questions and think critically about gender and sexuality, without fear of judgement (Sill, 2022; Yavuz, 2016). Through the creation of inclusive school environments that celebrate diversity, a reduction in incidences of HBTH bullying would also be seen, which may have significant impacts on CYP's mental health and emotional wellbeing (Yavuz, 2016).

3.10.3 Supporting wider systems

At a wider systems level, EPs work within LA systems and could raise awareness of the importance of inclusive changing and toilet facilities within schools and community provisions (Yavuz, 2016). Disabled toilets are often suggested as an alternative for gender variant people, but this can often serve to increase feelings of isolation; toilets can play an important role in shaping a child's identity and it is essential that LAs think outside of the binary when designing toilet and changing facilities (Slater et al., 2018; Yavuz, 2016). By working at a systemic level EPs could be able to support senior leaders in developing inclusive policies and practices that would challenge heteronormativity in all school settings within a LA (Charlton, 2020).

At present there remains a tendency for schools to overstate the risk agenda associated with queer youth, especially trans CYP; EPs could support with the creation of a LA gender variance, or LGBTQ+, guidance document, which would disrupt this narrative (Formby, 2015; Yavuz, 2016). In this way the LA would be giving consistent messages to schools on how they might explore their own environments to make them more inclusive and give good practice examples and guidance on writing inclusive policies (Read et al., 2020; Yavuz, 2016). As a result, staff would be acting in proactive ways by ensuring their environments disrupt heteronormativity, thus ensuring their inclusivity and sense of safety (Bowskill, 2017).

3.10.4 Next steps for EPs

Although it seems clear form the above that EPs might hold some of the 'tools' to help create new dialogues regarding the disruption of heteronormativity in schools, EPs themselves first need to reflect upon their own beliefs, and possible unconscious biases, and the impact this may have on the CYP and organisations with whom they are working (Read et al., 2020; Marks, 2012). It is also essential that EPs consider the ethical guidelines put forward by both the British Psychological Society (BPS) and Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) to which they are constrained to reflect on whether they are acting within their own competencies (BPS, 2021; Charlton, 2020; HCPC, 2015). Research states that EPs often lack understanding of gender issues; they could therefore consider engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) by seeking out training, so they are well equipped to support schools in this area and enable change for queer CYP (Bowskill, 2017; Charlton, 2020; Court, 2019; Marks, 2012). Educational psychology services (EPSs) could also reflect on their competencies as a whole and consider service-wide training on LGBTQ+ issues and should consider their own policies and ensure they are reflective of the inclusive stance they are sharing with schools (Court, 2019; Robinson, 2010). This may also be pertinent for Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) courses to ensure all newly qualified EPs are competent in support in this area (Court, 2019). It is only when EPs and EPSs develop their own understanding that they can support schools to prioritise LGBTQ+ equality and the disruption of heteronormativity to bring it in line with other anti-discriminatory practices/policies, such as anti-racism (Marks, 2012). It is then that EPs can begin to work at supporting the disruption of heteronormativity at the three levels outlined above.

4.0 Research rationale and research questions

The preceding literature review has highlighted the following:

- Heteronormativity can have a significant influence on school environments which may begin in the primary school, or even earlier, within preschool settings (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019).

- Most of the research in this area focused on the secondary school context, despite evidence that heteronormativity has an influence during the primary school years.

- Despite an increase in inclusive legislation and curriculum changes that have attempted to increase inclusivity, there remains a concerning number of queer CYP experiencing HBTH bullying (Stonewall, 2017a).

- Religious believes can act as both a barrier and a facilitator for LGBTQ+ inclusivity in school environments.

- Teachers want to do more to tackle heteronormativity but fears of parental backlash may act as a barrier.

- Concerns about disrupting childhood innocence, particularly in the primary sector, may leave teachers apprehensive about making changes that might upset the status quo.

- The voices of teachers within the primary school context are lacking in the literature on the influence of heteronormativity in education settings.

- There is a potential role for Educational Psychologists in supporting schools with the work of disrupting heteronormativity.

- There is currently a dearth of research that explores the influence of heteronormativity in the Welsh context, this is particularly concerning when queer CYP in Wales experience the highest incidences of HBTH bullying in the UK (Stonewall, 2017a).

The dearth of recent teacher voice within the primary sector warrants further exploration, due to the evidence found which suggests that heteronormativity influences at this age (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009). It is hoped that this, alongside the

exploration in the Welsh Context, will offer an understanding of the perceptions of heteronormativity in primary schools from current primary school teachers, teaching in South Wales; something which is currently absent in the literature. It is hoped that a cultivation of these perceptions will be supportive in offering implications for EP practice in how best to offer schools guidance, based upon where they already are on their journey towards disrupting heteronormativity in schools, and creating LGBTQ+ inclusive environments. Due to the current lack of research gaining primary school teachers' perspectives in this area, the following research question would be useful to explore:

- *How is heteronormativity in schools viewed by primary school teachers in Wales?*

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"You don't want to get anything wrong. That's the trouble isn't it": Exploring primary school teachers' constructions of heteronormativity in schools in Wales.

Section B: Major Empirical Study

Word count: 12,315

Abstract

Aim: The aim of this research was to explore primary school teachers' perceptions of heteronormativity in their school settings and the impact this has (or does not have) on children and young people. This included discussions around LGBTQ+ issues, sexuality, and gender expression.

Methods: Focus groups were conducted with two groups of primary school teachers; one made up of 4 teachers, and one made up of 6 teachers. The transcripts of these focus groups were analysed using Reflexive Thematic Analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Analysis: During the analysis, links to theory and literature were developed, including links to Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Bronfenbrenner, 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Six themes and four subthemes were identified through analysis. The six themes are named: 1. "Boys are more physical" – are children born to fit gender roles?; 2. "
You're not going to teach my child it's okay to be a boy are you?" – grabbling with parental pressures; 3. "You're in a quagmire of what's the right thing to do" – teacher uncertainty about supporting these needs; 4. Seeing outside of the bubble: the support of external professionals; 5. "It's obviously a lot different to our catchment area"; and 6. "We're on the right track" – the progress made.

Conclusions: The themes reflect a need for educational psychologists (EPs) to support schools to disrupt heteronormativity in their settings, at the multiple levels of EP practice. Implications for EP practice and the practice of school staff are tentatively offered. Perceived strengths and limitations of the research project are addressed, and suggestions for future research are proposed.

Keywords: Heteronormativity; gender; gender expression; sexuality; LGBTQ+.

1.0 Introduction

Heteronormativity can be described as the "pervasive, often invisible norm of heterosexuality that assumes a binary conception of sex (male/female), corresponding gender expression (masculine/feminine), and a natural attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality)" (Krebbekx, 2021, p. 18). Despite a growing understanding that gender and sexuality are culturally and socially constructed phenomena (Burr, 2015; Butler, 1999), heteronormativity prevails as a cultural force in society (Cloughessy, 2020; DePalma & Jennet, 2010). This has led to heteronormative societies which propagate a patriarchal gender hierarchy that privileges men and boys over women and girls; particularly those who prescribe to traditional masculinity (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). This results in differing expectations for men and women and this view of gender that society holds, dictates what we wear and what activities we engage in (Brill & Pepper, 2008). People who do not fit the traditional gender binary, or conform to cultural gender norms, tend to be marginalised and these binary constructions of sexuality and gender act as vehicles for oppression such as homophobic, biphobic, transphobic and heteronormative (HBTH) bullying (Carlile, 2020; Carrera, DePalma, & Lameiras, 2012; McBride & Schubotz, 2017; Woolley, 2020). This continues to maintain a dominant discourse that positions heterosexuality and binary concepts of gender as the norms within our society (McBride & Schubotz, 2017). The heteronormative process intimately connects sex, gender, and sexuality (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009; Addison, 2012) with heterosexuality and conformity to (cis)gender norms being understood as natural and good (Addison, 2012). As a result, the privileges that are equated to those who are heterosexual and live within the traditional gender binary remain (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; McBride & Schubotz, 2017) despite the introduction of legislation, such as the Equality Act (2010) which aims to protect individuals from discrimination because of their sex, 'gender reassignment' (term used in the legislation), or sexual orientation (UK Government, 2010).

Heteronormativity prevails in institutions, like schools, where the gender binary is perpetuated and sexuality norms are reproduced, and thus maintained (Atkinson,

2021; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018; DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Markland, Sargeant & Wright, 2022). The systemic heteronormative ethos that exists in schools serves to oppress those who do not conform to gender and sexuality norms and is thus linked to HBTH bullying (Carlile, 2020; Cloughessy, 2020; DePalma & Jennet, 2010; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). The ethos continues to be perpetuated by the overshadowing effect of Section 28 of the Local Government Act made in 1988 by Margaret Thatcher's Conservative Government which put into place a "prohibition on promoting homosexuality by teaching or publishing material" (Local Government Act, 1988). Despite the act being revoked in 2000 in Scotland and 2003 in England and Wales, the research suggests that some teachers remain reluctant to tackle LGBTQ+ issues in schools (Robinson, 2010; Saunton & Simpson, 2011). This fear, or lack of confidence, is believed to have resulted in a culture that facilitates HBTH bullying, as teachers may be hesitant to tackle homophobic bullying or dismantle heteronormative structures due to fear of backlash from senior leaders or parents (Charlton, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; Robinson, 2010).

The rhetoric surrounding historical legislation, like Section 28, has left a legacy of framing LGBTQ+ issues as adult and dangerous for children, further perpetuating the fear held by teachers in covering topics of gender and sexuality, particularly to younger age groups (Bowskill, 2017; Carlile, 2020; Llewellyn, 2022). Despite a narrative of innocence and purity that surrounds primary-aged children, primary schools can be understood as "far from desexualised" but actually "heterosexualised and central to the regulation of gender and heteronormativity" (Atkinson, 2021, p. 452). Moreover, HBTH bullying is recognised to begin in the primary school, with children as young as three being capable of using homophobic language, such as 'gay' as an insult, with a plethora of different meanings attached to the word (Carlile, 2020; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). Furthermore, one participant in Bragg et al.'s study described knowing at age five that "gender could mean 'more than boy, girl, male, female'" (Bragg et al., 2018, p. 426). A shift may therefore be required from viewing children as naïve and without agency, and towards positioning them as active citizens, capable of thinking critically and creatively about LGBTQ+ issues and challenging heteronormativity (Carlile, 2020; Llewellyn, 2022).

1.1 Educational psychology relevance

Despite evidence of growing awareness of gender and sexuality diversity in schools, school systems continue to be entrenched in heteronormative ideals, which act as a cultural and institutional factor that upholds HBTH bullying (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). There therefore remains a need for guidance for educational professionals on how to best support LGBTQ+ children and young people (CYP) in our schools (Atkinson, 2021; Bowskill, 2017; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). According to the Association of Educational Psychologists (AEP) and Welsh Government (WG), EPs use a range of approaches to work with individual CYP, schools and wider systems (such as LAs), as well as working in partnership with families and carers to ensure a holistic approach is taken (AEP/WG, 2016). EPs are therefore well placed to support schools in this area, at the individual/family, whole school, and wider systemic levels of their work (Bowskill, 2019; Robinson, 2010; Yavuz, 2016). EPs already have the tools required for this work, such as consultation skills, systemic thinking, and knowledge of personal construct psychology (Court, 2019). Such tools could be utilised and harnessed in new ways to assist schools in supporting the LGBTQ+ population more effectively (Court, 2019).

EPs could support schools in creating systemic shifts towards the development of inclusive policies, the creation of LGBTQ+ safe places and the creation of LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculums that celebrate diversity and challenge inequality (DePalma & Jennet, 2010; Markland et al., 2022; Stonewall, 2017a). This may be beyond the scope of teachers, and the support of external professionals could be supportive to help them engage in some of the complexities of this work (Court, 2019; Markland et al., 2022). There has never been a greater need to teacher education in this area and research suggests that teachers are willing to develop their knowledge to better support LGBTQ+ CYP and it is important that they feel comfortable with LGBTQ+ topics to ensure pupils feel confident in their teachers' competence in this area (Bragg et al., 2018; Drury et al., 2022; Sill 2022). Stonewall Cymru (2017) and McIntyre (2009) suggest that some teachers might not have the language to discuss diverse sexualities and gender expressions, such as a lack of understanding of the term 'trans' and may

therefore feel uncomfortable discussing LGBTQ+ issues (O'Donoghue & Guerin, 2016). EPs could therefore help equip school staff through training to better their understanding of LGBTQ+ inclusive language and thus increase their confidence in using these terms with their pupils, colleagues, and parents.

Schools that adopt inclusive curriculums report less victimisation, greater acceptance among peers, and a greater sense of belonging (McCabe & Anhlat, 2022). For example, DePalma & Atkinson's (2009) 'No Outsiders' Project educated primary school practitioners on how they can be more inclusive; enabling children to develop positive and inclusive attitudes about gender diversity and sexuality before they take up stereotypical attitudes. This involved simple additions to the curriculum, such as the introduction of stories with gender non-conforming characters and families headed by same-sex couples. The impact of the project has been long lasting, with Atkinson (2021) (daughter of one of the original researchers) comparing the attitudes of children in two schools, one of which took part in the No Outsiders Project, and one of which that did not. The school not taking part maintained a silence on LGBTQ+ issues, leaving children as young as eight believing that their teachers "don't really talk about it cos they don't think it's right" [to be gay] (Atkinson, 2021, p. 457). Her findings highlighted that the inclusion of formal equalities discourses, embedded within the curriculum, resulted in non-heterosexualities being viewed more favourably and understood as acceptable by pupils. By bringing the most recent research and recommendations to the table, like those set out by the 'No Outsiders Project', EPs may be supportive in reducing the silence on LGBTQ+ issues still present in some schools, especially where teachers may not have encountered such issues before (Atkinson, 2021; Yavuz, 2016).

The recommendations suggested here advocate a role for EPs, at all levels of their work, to support in the disruption of heteronormativity and the damaging outcomes it can have in the form of HBTH bullying. For this work to be successful, EPs need to work closely with school staff to support them in making systemic shifts towards making their schools more inclusive. This provides rationale for exploring the perceptions of teachers on how heteronormativity is (or is not) influential in their school setting. It is

hoped that this will be supportive in offering implications for EP practice on how best to offer schools guidance in this area.

1.2 The current study

The aim of the current study is to build upon the research exploring the influence of heteronormativity and the influence this has within the primary age range. The research discusses the overshadowing impact of section 28 and the resulting teacher reluctance to discuss LGBTQ+ issues and attempt to disrupt heteronormativity in their settings, particularly with younger children. This is perpetuated through ideas of childhood innocence and fear of backlash from parents and senior leaders. It is therefore of value to explore the views of primary school teaching staff, and it is hoped that the cultivation of these views will offer useful implications for EPs. To add, there is currently dearth of research exploring the influence of heteronormativity in Welsh schools also warrants further exploration, especially as CYP in Wales experience the highest incidences of HBTH bullying in the UK (Stonewall, 2017a).

1.3 Research question

Based on the information outlined above, and the dearth of research exploring Welsh primary school teachers' views on the subject matter, this research aims to address the following research question:

- *How is heteronormativity in schools viewed by primary school teachers in Wales?*

2.0 Methods and Measurements

2.1 Theoretical framework

The theoretical framework which guided the present study is shown in figure 2.

Ontology	Epistemology	Theroretical Base	Method
Relativist	Social constructionist	Reflexive thematic analysis	Focus groups
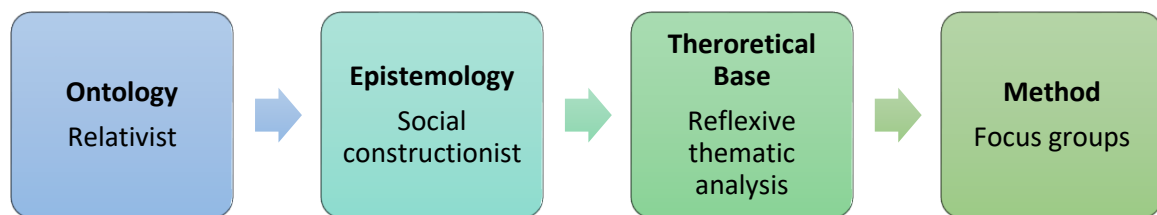
Figure 2 – theoretical framework

2.2 Research paradigm

The research is rooted in a qualitative research paradigm, which was chosen due to its fundamental assumption that there is no one and only correct version of reality or knowledge (Braun & Clarke, 2013). A relativist ontological position was therefore taken, which accepts that multiple realities exist within the human experience (Braun & Clarke, 2013; Burr, 2015). A social constructionist epistemological stance was adopted to acknowledge that the teachers' knowledge about heteronormativity would be sustained via social processes (Burr, 2015). In subscribing to this view, the researcher acknowledges that the data gathered in this research was derived though the participants' constructions of heteronormativity and how this is, or is not, influential within their classrooms. It also acknowledges that these constructions may have been influenced by the conversations held within the focus groups. This is explored further in parts 2.4.1 and 2.6 of Section C of this thesis.

2.3 Research design

In line with both the ontological and epistemological positions taken, the researcher chose to adopt a focus group methodology. The unstructured, but guided, nature of the focus group paradigm was in line with the theoretical framework of the research. Small group sizes of between 4 and 6 participants were developed to make the group easier to moderate and to generate rich discussion between participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013).

As encouraged by Braun and Clarke (2013), the researcher developed their own question schedule to guide the focus groups and elicit conversation between the participants (appendix G). This guide was based upon the 'sequence of questions' provided by McCarten & Robson (2016, p. 290) who suggest semi-structured interviews, or focus groups, should consist of: 1. An introduction; 2. A 'warm up'; 3. Main body of the interview; 4. A 'cool off' period; and 5. Closing statements. A 'clean up' question was also added to allow participants to raise any issues they felt were not covered during the focus group (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Questions were open in nature to allow participants to respond in their own words and to elicit conversation between group members. This guide was used flexibly and was guided by the conversation within the group to let conversation flow and to ensure that the researcher was not taking a directive role within the focus group. Prompts and probes were also used to expand of responses, when appropriate (Braun & Clarke, 2013; McCarten & Robson, 2016).

2.4 Participants

When discussing potentially controversial or sensitive subjects (such as heteronormativity within the primary school settings) it is important to create a sense of safety within the group to promote interaction between group members (Carlile, 2020; McCartan & Robson, 2016; Willig, 2013). As a result, a purposeful approach to sampling was used within the local authority where the researcher was on placement as part of DEdPsy course requirements. Pre-existing staff teams were used to increase feelings of safety for participants; this is expanded upon in parts 2.5 and 2.6 of Section C of this thesis.

2.4.1 Participant criteria

Participants were primary school teachers with at least one year of teaching experience. This was to ensure that they are relatively experienced within their role and would have had opportunities for continuing professional development (CPD). It was hoped that this inclusion criteria would ensure that participants have some knowledge of the topics discussed in the focus group.

2.4.2 Focus group details

Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2
Focus group 1 consisted of 6 teachers from 2 primary schools that are part of a federation of schools, and therefore work very closely together. Both schools are single-form entry schools and are located within a local authority Wales. The teachers included in the focus group held varying roles including: a Head of School, Additional Learning Needs Coordinator (ALNCo), class teacher with Teaching and Learning Responsibility (TLR) and class teacher. This focus group contained the following participants*: 1. Mrs Brown 2. Ms McFadden 3. Miss Morris 4. Ms Lawson 5. Mrs Vesey 6. Mx Ferguson	Focus group 2 consisted of 4 teachers from one medium-sized primary school located in the same local authority in Wales. It consists of 11 classes. The teachers held varying roles within the school, including: Headteacher, ALNCo, Deputy Head Teacher and Foundation Phase Lead. This focus group contained the following participants: 1. Miss Knight 2. Ms Mohamud 3. Mx Jones 4. Mrs Goodman

*Table 3; focus group details. *Participant names are pseudonyms.*

2.5 Procedure

Gatekeeper Consent

Ethical approval was granted in June 2022. A gatekeeper letter was then shared with Headteachers during initial planning meetings between EPs, ALNCOs and Headteachers at the start of the 2022/23 academic year (see appendix C).

Recruitment Poster and Information Sheet

The recruitment poster (appendix D) and information sheet (appendix E) was then shared with possible participants via the gatekeepers.

Formation of focus group

Once interest was expressed by 3 or more participants in a school setting, the gatekeeper organised a suitable time for the focus group to take place with the researcher.

Participant Consent

The participants returned the signed consent forms (appendix F) to the researcher before they were able to partake in the focus group.

Focus Groups and Debrief

Both focus groups took place in person, in the participants' school. Following the completion of the focus group, a debrief form was shared with all participants (appendix H).

Figure 3; Research procedure

2.6 Focus Group Procedure

The focus groups took place in person, in the schools where the participants were employed. Participants were offered snacks to put them at ease before the focus group commenced (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It was hoped that these factors, along with use of pre-existing groups, would increase feelings of safety amongst group members that would

promote interaction within the group (McCartan & Robson, 2016; Willig, 2013). Further detail of the focus group procedure is outlined in part 2.6 of Section C of this thesis.

2.7 Ethical Considerations

The Cardiff University School of Psychology Ethics Committee granted ethical approval for this study in June 2022. The proposed research adhered to the ethical guidelines outlined by the British Psychological Society (BPS) (2018) and the Health and Care Professions Council (HCPC) (2016). Ethical considerations focused on: consent; confidentiality, anonymity, and data protection; right to withdraw; interview recordings; and debriefing participants. Further information on ethical considerations can be found in appendix I.

2.8 Validity

The present study was assessed using Yardley's (2000; 2015) criteria to explore the validity of the study. The outcomes of this can be found in appendix J.

2.9 Data Analysis

The focus groups were transcribed verbatim and analysed using reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2006; 2013; 2019; 2021; 2022). Thematic analysis (TA) was first outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) where they described it as "a method for identifying, analysing, and reporting patterns (themes) within data" (p. 79). In more recent writings Braun and Clarke have used the term 'reflexive' TA to describe their approach, to highlight the importance of the researcher's positioning in the process of TA (Braun & Clarke, 2019; 2021; 2022). The researcher felt that the importance of researcher subjectivity, as opposed to objectivity, was particularly important here as the researcher holds the position that primary schools *are* heteronormative, and this goes on to privilege those whose gender expression corresponds with their gender assigned at birth, as well as those who are heterosexual (this is reflected on further in part 2.2. of Section C). Reflexive TA allowed the researcher to continue to hold this position and reflect upon its impact upon analysis, rather that treating it as something

to be controlled (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This is explored in greater detail in part 2.7 of Section C of this thesis.

The researcher used the updated TA 'phases' outlined by Braun and Clarke to conduct the reflexive TA of the transcribed focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2022). These phases, and how they looked in practice, can be found in figure 4.

Phase 1

- *Familiarising yourself with the dataset*
- This process involved immersion in the dataset through multiple listens to the audio recordings of the focus groups.
- Brief notes and analytic insights were made during this phase

Phase 2

- *Coding*
- During this stage I systematically worked through both transcripts and identified segments that were interesting and meaningful for my research question.
- Analytically-meaningful code labels were then applied to these, an example of this can be found in appendix K.

Phase 3

- *Generating initial themes*
- Codes were then printed and organised by hand into clusters that appeared to share a core idea that might be relevant to my research question (example photographs of this process can be found in appendix L).
- All coded data that appeared to share meaning, then became candidate themes.

Phase 4

- *Developing and reviewing themes*
- This process involved checking the initial themes made sense in relation to the coded extracts and the full dataset.
- The themes were reviewed and reconstructed during this phase, as it was felt some of the initial themes were actually code labels.
- Initial theme maps were drawn and links with existing knowledge began to be made here, and this is where a connection to (bio)ecological Systems Theory was first made (see appendix M).

Phase 5

- *Refining, defining and naming*
- This phased involved a fine-tuning of the analysis and ensuring that each theme was built around a strong core concept; this involved writing theme definitions for the intial themes (see appendix N).
- Concise and informative names were made here but these names continued to evolve during the process of writing up. Corresponding quotations were then grouped into these themes (see appendix O).

Phase 6

- *Writing up*
- The write up is also considered a key part of the analytic process in Reflexive TA.
- During the writing up process, links with the research questions, existing literature and theory were made and implications for EP and teacher practice were developed.

Figure 4; phases followed to complete reflexive TA

3.0 Analysis

This section presents the findings following the reflexive TA of the data. The focus groups were treated as one 'dataset' and the themes drawn are reflective of both focus groups; this is in line with Braun and Clarke's guidance for conducting reflexive TA (Braun and Clarke, 2022).

Analysis of the data resulted in the development of six themes, and a further four subthemes. The themes highlight the importance of systemic thinking, and the influence various elements within a system have on CYP (Charlton, 2020). Thinking in this way allows us to shift the belief that issues reside within an individual, and instead implore us to consider how individuals affect and are affected by their environment (Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994; Dowling & Osborne, 1994). The six themes and four subthemes are Presented visually as a thematic map in figure 5, below. The analytic process, how themes developed, and how the connection to (bio)ecological systems theory was explored is provided in more detail in part 2.7 of Section C.

3.1 Thematic map
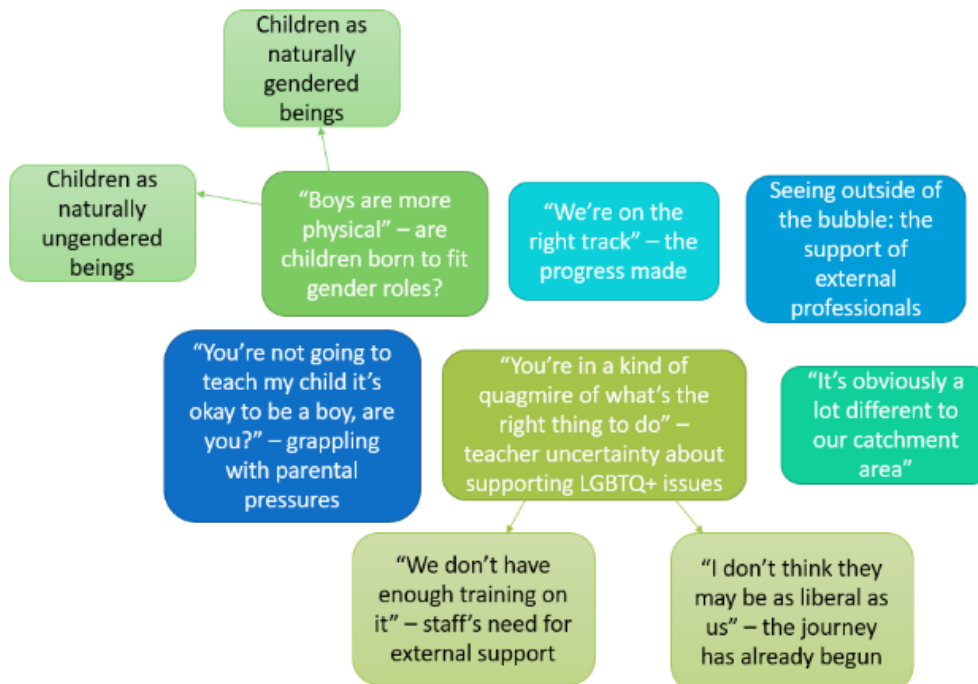
Figure 5; thematic map

3.2 "Boys are more physical" – are children born to fit gender roles?

This theme highlights the role of the individual child at the centre of the present exploration of heteronormativity in primary school settings. Participants referred to children as both blank slates, who do not yet know about the complex constructs of gender, whilst also describing them as naturally taking up gendered roles in school. As such, this theme is comprised of two subthemes to display this contradiction, which represent the "multiple and contradictory experiences of early childhood" (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019, p. 657). The subthemes are named: 1. *'children as naturally gendered beings'* and 2. *'children as naturally ungendered beings'*. This reflects the two positions participants held simultaneously when talking about the CYP with whom they work. Subsequently, CYP were seen as both immune to the influence of heteronormativity, whilst also being seen to victim to its influence by already taking up gendered expectations in their play and expression.

3.2.1 Children as naturally gendered beings

Participants explored a core belief that children have a natural desire to explore toys or activities that are *for* their gender. This included the positioning of boys as louder, more boisterous and drawn towards toys related to construction, or playing more physical games on the playground. Conversely, girls were positioned as naturally

drawn to role playing and the home corner area of the classroom. This is highlighted by the below extract from focus group 2:

Focus Group 2:
Mx Jones: *I think if, generally, as a rule, the boys are more physical.*
Miss Knight: Yeah, yeah
Mx Jones: *I would say,*
Miss Knight: Yeh, I think that,
Mx Jones: *And the girls are more, ummm, I suppose […]the girls are often role playing, aren't they, in their play, is what they do[…]but the boys are like grabbing each other, wrestling and you know.*
Miss Knight: *Yeah, tagging games in various disguises.*

The conversational extract here shows the agreement between Miss Knight and Mx Jones about the natural propensity for boys to take up more "physical" games on the playground, such as wrestling and running games. Although they suggest this is not a hard and fast rule for all pupils, their conversation implies that pupils tend to split themselves into gendered groups for their play, with boys playing together in a rough and tumble way, with girls preferring role playing games. This was a sentiment shared by Ms Mohamud and Mrs Brown when describing unstructured classroom play in their settings:

Ms Mohamud: *What, what I would say though, is I've got construction and small world together, sort of small construction, and then roleplay. And they have that as an area. And they can choose either way. And I would definitely say girls are more inclined to be in the roleplay section and the boys are more inclined to be in the small world construction end. And that's their choice.*

Mrs Brown: *But, I think some of our children do just naturally go to those roles. So, we do find boys happily go to the construction […]*

Again, here the overarching sentiment appeared to be that, generally speaking, children have a natural propensity towards certain kinds of play, with boys more

interested in construction, and girls more interested in the role play area of the classroom. This mirrors the above extract from focus group two. What is common amongst these extracts is the unguided natural of the play described by the participants, both on the yard and in the classroom. It seems that they find, when given free choice, children tend to group themselves by gender, and prefer to engage in activities which might be described as *for* their gender.

The idea of boys being positioned as "more physical" beings was shared by both groups and may be reflective of a performance of normative young masculinity. Butler states that gender is best understood as the performative result of received cultural meaning, which constructs the illusion of the gendered self (Butler, 1999). It may be that young boys act in "physical" ways as a normative performance of 'boy' that is socially constructed and passed over to the school environment (Butler, 1999; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). The physical nature of boys' play described here has become normalised in playground cultures and are regarded as socially acceptable (Ringrose & Renold, 2010).

It was of interest to the researcher that when discussing normative gender performances, both within and between focus groups, participants tended to be referring to children's free play. Perhaps because the behaviours discussed took play during free play and unstructured activities, they appeared to be a tendency for participants to see this behaviour as "naturally" occurring, resulting in children being "more inclined" to partake in gendered play/activities. This is likely emphasised since gender norms tend to be matched with biological sex, resulting in them being understood as naturally occurring, rather than socially constructed (Addison, 2012; Burr, 2015; DePalma, 2013). Ringrose & Renold (2010) posit that this often results in gender performances being played off as 'natural' by school staff. This idea is central to Butler's (1999) gender theory in which she states that cultural configurations tie sex and gender together in a way that is generally assumed to be "natural and necessary" (p. 187). Gender theory suggests that gender identity is best understood as an imitation, a performative result of received cultural meaning from which we construct our gendered selves (Butler, 1999). In the classroom setting gender is enacted through

children's interactions with objects in a dynamic way, which results in the gendered behaviours the participants were reporting (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019). It is also possible that the areas being described above (the role play/home corner and small world construction) are areas which inexplicably contain gender associations and therefore have the power to elicit gender performance, thus reinforcing compulsory heterosexuality in a way that may not be seen in other areas of the school (Cloughessy, 2020; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019).

Lyttleton-Smith (2019) talks of the dynamic entanglement of children and objects in the classroom and their power to produce gender; this is reflective of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) description of children at this level, in which he discussed the importance of dyads and reciprocal relations to child development. These reciprocal relations will also be seen with children's peers during the activities the participants discussed above. Here Bronfenbrenner talks of the importance of individual roles that people take up: "associated with every role in society are role expectations" (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 85). He states that the positioning of a person in their role tends to evoke perceptions of them, and these are enhanced when roles are well established within society. This would therefore be the case for gender roles which are a cultural phenomenon, well founded in society (Butler, 1999; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). There may therefore be a 'inclination' for children to evoke the behaviours (seen above) in accordance with the expectations for their [gender] role (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Because dyads and reciprocal relations are so important at this level (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), it is possible that the 'natural' order is highlighted, and therefore maintained, by children's peers, even from a young age, during their free play (DePalma, 2013). As a result, gender normative policing may be occurring here, with peers reinforcing gender roles within the unstructured time participants were describing (Abbott et al., 2021; DePalma, 2013).

3.2.2 Children as naturally ungendered beings

As well as reflecting upon children's *natural* propensity to take up traditionally gendered roles, participants also explored the core idea that children were gender blank slates who do not yet fit gender norms. Central to this idea was the notion that *all* children play with *all* toys, and do not see the gendered connotations attached to particularly toys, sports, or activities. This was illustrated by Mrs Goodman in her description of the home corner area within the classroom:

> **Mrs Goodman:** *And you know, home corner is one of your areas in year one, and everyone goes in it and plays in it, quite equally, there's nothing quite, quite, I couldn't tell you necessarily, we watch them a bit, what roles they take when they go into it.*

This is in direct contrast to the reflections shared about the home corner as part of the subtheme 'children as naturally gendered beings'. Despite this, there appears to be an uncertainty in Mrs Goodman's reflection when she said, "I couldn't tell you necessarily", suggesting that this may be an assumption, rather than a definite observation that pupils have been playing in an *ungendered* way in the home corner. However, this idea of all children playing "quite equally" was shared in the below extract from focus group one, who discuss how pupils transcended gender norms within the classroom.

> **Focus Group 1:**
> **Miss Morris:** *And we will notice, like, the boys will happily go and use the teddy bears, and maybe do a roleplay or the puppets, and they might snuggle up with a book and things like that. So, it's not, it's not in my class, I wouldn't say it's always necessarily based on what the gender expectation is for them.*
> **Ms Lawson***: I think maybe it's more acceptable in school, or the children see if as more acceptable […] you may see the same in my class, you know, you see girls in the construction and some of the girls giving the boys what for on the yard and in football and stuff.*

Within this extract it appears as though participants are exploring an idea about freedom of expression which might be afforded to children during the hours they are in school. Ms Lawson shared that she believes children see these behaviours as

'acceptable' in school, suggestion that such freedom of expression may not be possible for them in other environments, such as the home.

It was of interest to the researcher that in both extracts, participants were here discussing pupils in the younger age ranges within the primary school. It is therefore possible that their reflections construct these younger children as both naïve and asexual (DePalma & Atkinson, 2010; DePalma & Jennett, 2010). Children in this age range tend to be positioned as innocent and pure (Llewellyn, 2022) and the participants may therefore be constructing them as blank slates, who do not yet have the agency to develop their gender identity. It is possible that this is the result of wider protectionist discourses related to childhood innocence and the desire to shield young children from ideas and conversation about gender and sexuality (Llewellyn, 2022).

Conversely, it is possible that the early childhood, as opposed to naïve and asexual, could be defined as queer; by associating early childhood with queerness, rather than innocence, the fluidity and flexibility of gender performance at this age can be appreciated (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Taylor & Richardson, 2005). Gender performances may be continually shifting during this time, and this may be seen most explicitly in areas such as the home corner and roleplay, as mentioned by the participants above (Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Taylor & Richardson, 2005). Taylor & Richardson (2005) go so far as to label the home corner a space which acts as a 'heterotopia', a transformative site which challenges its intended heteronormative design. As such, all kinds of gender transformations are afforded to take place in these spaces which exceed gender norms, thus blurring the boundaries of gender categories (Taylor & Richardson, 2005).

3.3 "You're not going to teach my child it's okay to be a boy, are you?" – grappling with parental pressures

Bronfenbrenner (1979) describes the importance of the immediate setting of children and young people as highly influential to their development, something he coined the microsystem. Central to this is the family which he described as the primary setting in which children develop (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Participants explored this core idea in

both focus groups with the dominant narrative that parents have a monumental influence over their child's life and beliefs. As a result, participants shared perceptions of limited control over their influence of children when their parents were in opposition with the stance of the school. This discussion was commonly centralised around discussion of trans CYP and the new RSE curriculum for Wales, as illustrated in the below extract from focus group one:

Focus Group 1:
Mx Ferguson: *I had one parent come in, when they said that we were going to be teaching RSE and said, 'You're not gunna to teach my child, it's okay to be a boy, are you?' […]*
Ms Lawson: *And I think as the years have gone on, I think things have changed. And with regards to maybe the age of parents in school […] you know society's changing isn't it and like I say, I think parents are worried, like you say about what they could be maybe open to that doesn't always fit with their…*
Ms McFadden: *And it's where they're gaining information from as well.*

This extract highlights the mismatch between what teachers felt was the right thing to be teaching pupils (the new RSE curriculum) and what parents believed this new curriculum would entail. The participants suggested that parents were gaining incorrect information about the content of the new curriculum leading them to come to extreme conclusions. This was highlighted by Ms McFadden when she said, "it's where they're gaining information form as well", suggesting that parents may be getting information about the new curriculum from sources outside of the school context. This extract implies that although the new RSE curriculum has the systemic potential to disrupt heteronormativity in schools in Wales, this is often resisted by parents, leaving teachers fearful that they will be individually blamed for the changes made to the curriculum.

Focus group one also discussed the powerful influence of parental pressure as part of a reflection related to their experience of having a transgender pupil in their school:

Focus Group 1:
Ms Lawson:
*And you know, being in year one, year 2, its very, you know, they're five, six and seven even then it's a very young age to be like, to start anything. So, I think they need to be at school and parents as you know, everyone's not the same, but be supported in their decisions. But then in four years' time, what happens if she just sort of grew out of it? *pause**
Ms Lawson:
I felt that mum made, or helped to, how do I say this properly?
Mrs Brown:
Almost facilitated?
Ms Lawson:
Facilitated something, that maybe necessarily I felt she was too young, that's my opinion. She might have been too young for, but that has, you know, she's still young. She's 11, 12?
Ms McFadden:
13 now
Ms Lawson:
*13. To me 13 is still young, isn't it? Like these bodies are going through changes, milestones you're still hitting, like I say. So, like I said to be supportive? And then, like I said, I don't know what the right age is, *inaudible* I just felt year one, year two, was a very, to sort of home in on something and like...*
Mrs Vesey:
Make it a thing.
Ms Lawson:
Yeh, make a thing about it, whereas it might have not.
Mrs Brown:
Maybe they'll be a tom boy and then they'll grow up.

Central to their conversation was the construction of a 'pushy parent' who they flet may have been forcing a trans agenda onto a child who they felt was "too young". They discussed the bodily changes that children go through during puberty, leaving teachers worried that parents may support children to make decisions about their gender too soon and then they "grow up". This link to childhood innocence is regularly seen in the literature with teachers displaying an inability to dissociate LGBTQ+ issues from sexual activity; thus, regarding it as inappropriate and not required for younger children (Carlile, 2020; Llewellyn, 2022). Again, this extract highlights what appears to be a mismatch between what the teachers and parent felt was the right thing to do to

support this child. There is also a sense from these two extracts about the forcefulness with which these opinions are felt, in a way that might be felt with other inclusionary practices, resulting in tension and ill-feeling between parents and teachers.

The tension felt between parents and teachers surrounding these issues was relayed by Ms Mohamud when reflecting on how the parental backlash to the RSE curriculum has been damaging to her self-esteem as a woman in a same sex marriage:

> **Ms Mohamud:** *But I think people like myself, who, who are in a relationship, somebody with the same gender, the backlash from the RSE has really put us as a, as a group, give gets given us a feeling again, of feeling concerned about being open and honest, because you have this backlash from parents about sexuality, transgender, all those things. And whilst I think a lot more of it is to do with transgender people and gender identity, there is a huge group still protesting on the streets saying you can't teach my children to about being gay, whereas, and that obviously impacts on my esteem, you know, my identity, it is, it's not very nice.*

The impact on her self-esteem that Ms Mohamud described was upsetting for me as the researcher to hear. This experience may be reflective of the heterosexual logic, through which children are expected to present as both asexual and heterosexual, with LGBTQ+ teachers similarly bound by this logic (Llewellyn, 2022). As a result, Ms Mohamud is left "feeling concerned about being open and honest" about her sexuality due to this parental discourse of protection and push back against the RSE curriculum, as seen above in the first extract from focus group one. Participants fears may be well founded, with the media reporting parental protests as well as many examples within the literature of resistance towards mentioning LGBTQ+ identities in lessons (Llewellyn, 2022; Markland et al., 2022).

The parental backlash that was discussed in both focus groups is often couched in a protectionist discourse relating to ideas of childhood innocence with LGBTQ+ curriculums being viewed as unnecessary for young children (Llewellyn, 2022). In extreme cases parents are even reported to have requested that their child be removed from lessons where LGBTQ+ topics are discussed; a narrative that may feed into the damage to Ms Mohamud's identity, mentioned above (Markland et al., 2022).

These extreme cases are often linked to religion, or religious groups (Nash & Browne, 2021), something which focus group two discussed in the extract below:

Focus Group 2:
Mrs Goodman: Because you're fighting against somebody's beliefs, isn't it? So, it's not. It's not just like, I'm having a conversation and trying to educate you on this. You're really like, some people are so 'this is no, this is absolutely how I feel, it's my choice, my child, my this, my that'. And it's really hard to kind of have that balanced discussion with somebody about it when they're that vehement over things.
Ms Mohamud: And it is difficult, because at the end of the day, it is their child, and it is their choice, and it's their belief. So, we have to respect that as well. Especially with religious beliefs, we have to be really mindful of different people's beliefs and what they've been brought up to expect and experience.

This extract describes how the new RSE curriculum has almost put teachers in battle with parents who do not agree with the new content. Here the teachers highlighted that this is a stance that parents seem to be unwavering on, making it challenging for teachers to have meaningful discussions with them related to the RSE curriculum and LGBTQ+ topics. The participants were mindful that this topic may be perceived as against someone's beliefs and that they would have to respect that, which seemingly acted as a barrier towards "balanced discussion". LGBTQ+ issues are unique in this way as being perceived as against religion or "against somebody's beliefs" to use Mrs Goodman's words (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Vanderbeck & Johnson, 2015). This leaves teachers feeling that they "have to respect that"; reinforcing the notion that teachers have limited influence on their pupils when compared to their parents (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). With famous cases, such as that of the Rowe family, who removed their child from a school as a result of a trans pupil being in their class, it may not be surprising that a fear has manifested itself among teachers when covering topics of gender and sexuality (Nash & Browne, 2021; Bowskill, 2017; Llewellyn, 2022). These pressures may be why participants reported having a challenging time addressing sexualities equality, and research states that this may result in CYP having different access to LGBTQ+ education both within and between schools across the UK (Abbott et al., 2015; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). To add, the experienced, and perceived, fear of parental backlash discussed in these extracts appears to have

resulted in teachers feeling uncomfortable about implementing LGBTQ+ inclusive curriculum changes. This is likely exasperated in western societies when the role of parents is presumed to have a broader influence over a child's life than their teacher (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), thus potentially leaving these teachers feeling increasingly powerless to these external influences of heteronormativity (van Leet, 2016).

3.4 "You're in a kind of quagmire of what's the right thing to do" – teacher uncertainty about supporting LGBTQ+ issues

Although the family is seen as the primary setting in which CYP develop, it is only one of a multitude of settings that are key in the process of development (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). Environmental factors also play a key role in development, with the school described as the "only setting that serves as a comprehensive context for human development" outside of the home (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, p. 132; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Interactions with individuals who occupy a variety of roles are key to the facilitation of development according to Bronfenbrenner, interactions with teachers must therefore be seen as key as CYP see them most days (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This theme: "You're in a quagmire of what's the right thing to do" – teacher uncertainty about supporting LGBTQ+ issues, reflects the influence teachers have and the perceived barriers and facilitators that they face when supporting LGBTQ+ inclusion. The theme is comprised of two contradictory subthemes named: 1. "I don't think they may be as liberal as us" and 2. *"We don't have enough training on it"*. These reflect the opposing core beliefs held by participants that their schools were already nurturing, inclusive places that embraced LGBTQ+ issues, this is reflected by the first subtheme. Whilst the second subtheme reflects the construction of themselves as helpless when facing these issues and needing the support of external professions to help navigate LGBTQ+ inclusivity.

3.4.1 *"I don't think they may be as liberal as us"*

A perception was shared across the focus groups that disrupting heteronormativity was something that needed to be done elsewhere. Both settings perceived themselves as well on their way on the journey to disrupting heteronormativity as illustrated by Mx Ferguson from focus group one and the conversational extract from focus group two:

Mx Ferguson: *But I think in general across, you know, schools, I don't think they may be as liberal as us.*

Focus Group 2:
Mrs Goodman: *But I definitely there is an acceptance in this school, where you do what you want to do. You know, there's no, there's no judgement for what, it's not like he's doing a boy's thing, or she's doing a girl's thing really? It doesn't really come up.*
Mx Jones: *No, no, I wouldn't say it comes up with the children, I don't think they ever say things like that. Like you say they choose to do things […]*
Miss Knight: *No, everybody has the opportunity to do everything.*

Discussion in both focus groups centred on the nurturing nature of their settings with "liberal" staff that fostered a sense of "acceptance" in their schools. This resulted in staff feeling that their settings had fostered an enhanced sense of belonging for their pupils when compared to other schools in the local area, hence Mx Ferguson's comparison "I don't think they may be as liberal as us". It appeared that this resulted in participants feeling that they were already progressing well with their LGBTQ+ inclusivity without the support of external professionals by allowing all children the opportunity to do whatever they like, regardless of any gendered connotations that

may be attached to an activity or toy. One factor that Miss Morris felt may be causal in creating a more "liberal" and "accepting" staff group was their age:

> **Miss Morris:** *I think one thing we've got to like celebrate about us as a federation, which I duno if it's always good, but we are quite a young staff as well, and I think like we are quite accepting, but in the know of what's going on in the media and things. In schools where, you know, the teachers have been around for a while, who are not quite used to change, they might not know what those terminologies are.*

Miss Morris felt that because of their younger age, staff in her setting were more progressive in their thinking, the activities they presented and the language they used, due to "knowing what's going on in the media and things". As such, participants appeared to be positioning themselves as progressive, willing, supportive, and non-judgemental with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusivity in their settings. It seems that Miss Morris felt that being younger increased their increased willingness to make changes when compared to teachers who may have "been around for a while". The implication here seems to be that younger teachers may not need as much input, in terms of training, to learn correct terminologies for LGBTQ+ inclusivity, and are thus on their journey to making progress in this regard.

Central to the ideas shared in the above quotes is that these settings are safe places for CYP, where they are free to explore their gender and sexuality in whatever way they choose and are accepted by staff for this exploration. This was reflected by Ms Mohamud when discussing a pupil in their setting who had been exploring different gender expressions:

> **Ms Mohamud:** *The nice thing is that she felt that she could express her, her wants or desires and felt safe to do so really, isn't it? And, you know, the school responded, and the family responded as we would hope they would.*

As a result of fostering these accepting school cultures, Ms Mohamud felt as though this pupil was free to experiment with gender without fear of judgment. She also alludes to a positive relationship between the family and the school which facilitated

this exploration. This is in contrast to the theme "you're not going to teach my child it's okay to be a boy, are you?", which highlights the barriers to inclusion that are put in place when families and staff members do not communicate effectively.

The need to be accepting and non-judgemental in the way these participants describe is key especially when you consider the research which states that primary school teachers are experiencing increasing numbers of pupils communicating about non-heteronormative ideas within the primary context (van Leet, 2016). Fostering acceptance and being liberal therefore appears to come some way to forearming teachers when they are faced with different experiences. Research suggests that it is this that may be responsible for decreasing incidences of homophobia in schools with LGBTQ+ pupils having more positive school experiences and being more comfortable than ever being themselves in school (McCormack & Anderson, 2010; McCormack, 2012; Stonewall, 2017a). To add, the liberal and accepting culture that participants described is reflected in the literature, which states that disrupting heteronormativity is perceived to be easier when the culture of the school already celebrates diversity (Markland et al., 2022).

The inclusivity, acceptance, and lack of judgement that participants described here was reflective of the advances in legislation and curriculum changes that strive for greater LGBTQ+ inclusivity, which have likely impact upon the participants teaching practice (Department for Education, 2019; UK Government, 2010; Welsh Government, 2021). As such, today's society is generally regarded are more accepting, and participants seem to be reflecting a growing awareness of gender and sexuality diversity and the role heteronormativity may be playing in their settings; this is reflected in other research of a similar nature (e.g., Atkinson, 2021; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010).

3.4.2 "We don't have enough training on it"

Despite exploring the core idea present previously, participants also felt that they still have much to learn in this area that they cannot do alone. Central to this was a feeling of fear among participants who felt heavy with the burden of having to be the perfect

role models to their pupils. One aspect of this was an anxiety around not knowing the correct language to discuss LGBTQ+ topics and a pressure to ensure they were always getting things right. This was illustrated by the below extract from focus group two when discussing a pupil who had been experimenting with their gender expression:

Focus Group 2:
Ms Mohamud:
The staff did say that they found that difficult, didn't they, because when that was brought up in a meeting recently, in the RSE audit, a couple of members of staff, said they didn't know how to deal with that situation. And they didn't know how to, you know, they knew obviously, they did it, they haven't had prejudice or discrimination, but they weren't sure, the best thing to say, they didn't want to, I think what they said was…
Miss Knight:
You don't want to get anything wrong. That is the trouble isn't it.
Mx Jones:
It's the fear isn't it of being accused of being bigoted in some way when you don't and it's just a change in that and it's a social change as well in terms of pronouns and that type of thing as well […]
Mrs Goodman:
And remembering to say the changed name is a tricky thing as well. And I think you don't want to, you don't get blamed for not doing enough, for doing too much, for you know […] you're in a kind of quagmire of what's the right thing to do and we don't have enough training on it.

Although this discussion started by reflecting on the positions of other staff members within the school (who were not present in the focus group), the other participants were quick to relate to this position. The overriding sentiment that seems to be felt here is a fear of doing the wrong thing. Unlike other topics, where making a mistake and learning from that mistake to do better in the future is the norm, this did not appear to be the construct participants created around LGBTQ+ issues. There was a sentiment shared that you must do the correct thing, or nothing at all, for fear of getting it wrong. This sentiment was shared by focus group one, who also alluded to a lack of adequate training on these topics, with staff left to unpick what is best to do with regards to LGBTQ+ inclusion:

> **Focus Group 1:**
> **Mrs Brown:** *I suppose it would be appropriate training for staff for where they would come in for it, exactly like the RSE. Sometimes you're left to things, and sometimes you're left as staff to unpick it which I don't think is fair for staff with everything else they're doing, there should be specific training and say look this is how you could approach it[…]*
> **Ms Lawson:** *There's consistency across schools then as well.*

Mrs Brown was a head of school and there appeared to be a level of advocacy for her staff in her statement here, with her feeling it is unfair for staff to have to teach these topics without having adequate training from external professionals. Ms Lawson supported this statement with a comment about consistency across schools, implying that the lack of formal guidance and training for teachers, is resulting in different approaches, both within and between schools in the local cluster. This sentiment was supported by focus group two in a discussion about knowing what LGBTQ+ resources might be suitable in their classrooms, with participants relying on personal experiences to feel comfortable and confident knowing what resources are available to them:

> **Focus Group 2:**
> **Mrs Goodman:** *And it's getting the books that are out there. It's knowing what books are out there to use and that are appropriate as well. So, it's a lot of kind of, you don't know sometimes what's available?*
> **Ms Mohamud:** *Well, I wouldn't imagine that for the sake of argument, that our year two or year three teacher would know what, what books would be sensible to have in class, which would have parents of the same gender, or parents who one person who identifies as a different gender. The only reason I can do it in year one, it's because I've got them for my son. So, I know the books, and I know what's appropriate, because if they're appropriate for him, I know they'd be appropriate in class. And I brought them in and shared them with the class because it's easy for me to.*
> **Group:** *Yeah*
> **Ms Mohamud:** *But you wouldn't assume everyone else would be in that position and nor should, or would they, because they've not been educated in in.*

Ms Mohamud described relying on her personal experience of being a queer parent, buying LGBTQ+ inclusive books for her child, and it was only because of this that she knew what would be appropriate in her class. She implies that it would be unlikely that other teachers would have this knowledge due to a lack of education for teachers in

this area. The lack of adequate training and desire for training in this area is well documented in the literature (e.g., Bowskill, 2017). Similar to the experiences described in both focus groups, teachers within the literature reported being willing to develop their knowledge in this area, but continue to have no specialist training, leaving them feeling ill-equipped to deal with LGBTQ+ issues and the new RSE curriculum, as mentioned above (Drury et al., 2022; Welsh Government, 2017). Some teachers report having never received LGBTQ+ training for issues like gender identity and are therefore left without the resources to support equity for LGBTQ+ pupils and work towards disrupting heteronormativity (Formby, 2015; Sill, 2022; van Leet, 2016). This reflects Ms Mohamud's comments about teachers not being educated in this area and Mrs Goodman's comment about a desire to know what's "out there".

This lack of education likely resulting in the "fear" described by participants in focus group 2 of "not doing enough, for doing too much". The fear about knowing "the best thing to say" is well documented in the literature with teachers cautious about the language they use for fear of offending pupils, or "being accused of being bigoted" (Charlton, 2020). This fear is well founded as Yavuz (2016) highlighted the importance of terminology and the potential impact that this may have on CYP, as highlighted in the Stonewall School reports (Stonewall, 2017a; Stonewall 2017b; Yavuz, 2016). Some researchers recommended staff admitting when mistakes are made but knowing the "right thing to do" requires knowledge of this research.

As well as support to know "what's available" (Mrs Goodman), participants also discussed a desire for reassurance from outside agencies to know that they were doing the right thing. This is reflective of research which states that teachers are often left unsure on how to respond to LGBTQ+ issues due to "unclear policies and procedures, lack or pre-service education and in-service training" (van Leet, 2016, p. 451). It may not therefore be surprising that Mrs Brown described feeling "left to things" which she rightly described as unfair for staff "with everything else they're doing". As research indicates, perhaps the participants were correct in viewing this work as beyond the scope of teachers, with external professionals required to help them engage in the complexities of this work moving forward (Court, 2019; Markland et al., 2022).

3.5 Seeing outside of the bubble: the support of external professionals

This theme explores the interconnectedness within and between schools, as well as with families, and the support participants felt was needed to ensure successful interrelations are created between different systems. A key concept explored as part of this theme, as touched upon above, is the need for external agencies to support the interrelations, as discussed here by focus group one:

> **Focus Group 1:**
> **Ms McFadden:** *And sometimes having that external person to discuss that individual case, I don't want to say we go with emotion, but sometimes it's very easy if there's a lot of emotion in a situation to be sort of distracted or sway, but it's coming in as independent with the knowledge of different places we can access.*
> **Mrs Brown:** *Yeh, perspective.*

Ms McFadden here referred to the heightened emotions that may be at play during home-school meetings regarding a pupil that may wish to explore their gender or sexuality. It was suggested that leading with emotion in this way may act as a barrier to have meaningful discussions with parents surrounding these topics, and the external professionals could act as a facilitator to move things forward and protect the home-school relationship. There was also a suggestion that an external professional would be able to offer perspective and knowledge of different agencies and resources that might be support; a sentiment shared by focus group two:

> **Focus Group 2:**
> **Mrs Goodman:** *It's just, it's just finding the right support out there, isn't it and everyone here is so willing to do the right thing and wants to support as best they can, that you do get in a bit of a sticky wicket over…which way to go, you know, and its dead stressful, its dead hard to kinda know the right thing, because you just want to do right by the kid and by the family.*
> **Miss Knight:** *That's it isn't it.*

The feeling of heightened emotion experienced by teacher when discussing LGBTQ+ issues can again be felt here. There is a desire to do the right thing for their pupils but

feeling unprepared and without the suitable information to do this effectively. Miss Morris reflected that this kind of role to help teachers find "the right support out there" may be best taken up by an EP:

> **Miss Morris:** *And I think, like you said, having that perspective as an EP, you know, having that, knowing from outside of just our area, and our school and our catchment, because you can get like you said, especially with us lot, we love our kids so you get caught up in what's the best for them and obviously you'd know from external, going through different schools, what…it's like that proportionality of it all isn't it, what's going on here and where's the priority, is it just a phase, and you'd have a better, I imagine, you'd have more experience and knowing where you are within the stages of moving things along if they are looking to change.*

Miss Morris suggests that an educational psychologist may be able to offer the perspective that focus group one were desiring when engaging in this work. This perspective would be gained through the EP's work, visiting different settings, and the knowledge of different agencies and professionals that might be able to support. In this way the EP would be acting as the mesosystem described in Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory, which can be understood as the connectedness between settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986).

The potential role for the EP in allowing staff to see beyond the bubble of their school was explored by both focus groups. EPs may be supportive in allowing staff to see beyond their direct context and offer a wider, more balanced perspective of what is going on in other schools and in the wider community to offer a "proportionality of it all". This was key in Bronfenbrenner's original description of the mesosystem as taking place across the boundaries of different settings (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In his description this can occur when the same person engages in the same work within multiple settings, much like an EP going between the multiple schools within the LA in which they work (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Even though members of these settings may never meet, the EP can act as a link, sharing knowledge between settings and services. This may be supportive in offering schools "knowledge of different places" they can access, as well as offering their desired outsider perspective that is removed from some of the emotional ties that participants described.

Bronfenbrenner (1979) stated that when supportive links are created between schools, the developmental potential of each setting is enhanced (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). This may go some way to support the confidence of teachers when discussing LGBTQ+ topics and preventing theming them getting "in a bit of a sticky wicket over which way to go" to use Mrs Goodman's words. This communication could take a variety of forms and include supporting communication between settings in the microsystem (e.g., the home and the school), which may be supportive in helping schools "do right by the kid and the family". This is reflective of research exploring the role of the EP which sees the position as intrinsically linked to families and schools, meaning EPs are well placed to support schools and develop ways of working with the systems around the CYP (Charlton, 2020; Court, 2019). In her work exploring the role for EPs in supporting trans CYP, Charlton (2020) also states that staff would benefit from working with an EP to ask questions, seek reassurance and discuss practice. This is supported in other research that states there is a role for EPs in giving reassurance and coordinating action through signposting and linking with other services (Bowskill, 2017). This is what staff here (illustrated in all three quotes above, as well as in part 3.4.2) are desperately seeking for work in this area to allow them to engage in the complexities of disrupting heteronormativity (Court, 2019).

3.6 "It's obviously a lot different to our catchment area"

Both focus groups referred to the perceived influence that their context, within the South Wales Valleys, had on their ability to explore and discuss LGBTQ+ ideas within their schools setting. Central to this core idea was the fact that participants perceived their location as fundamentally different to other areas as summed up by Ms Lawson:

> **Ms Lawson:** *Cos you know, it's obviously a lot different to our catchment area.*

Ms Lawson's use of the word "obviously" suggests that the idea of this locality being fundamental different to other areas was well know and would be something that

would affect all their pupils. Participants shared that sentiment that the higher levels of deprivation in the area may perhaps be resulting in their schools being *behind* other, "more affluent" (Miss Morris, see appendix O) areas on their journey towards dismantling heteronormativity due to the influence of the community. Participants reflected that they felt it was part of their role to open the eyes of their pupils to the world beyond their local towns:

> **Focus Group 1:**
> **Miss Morris:** *you know, a lot of our children haven't gone beyond [local town]. So, you know, it's trying to open them to seeing all different types of people, you know.*
> **Ms Lawson**: *I think it's challenging the norm, isn't it, and having those open discussions and debates…*

This extract suggests that teachers in this locality felt an extra pressure to ensure that their pupils knew about the world outside of their immediate context, suggesting this was not something that pupils often had exposure to. Although the groups reflected on the positive influence they may be having in allowing children to see a world beyond their immediate context, participants also reflected on the core idea of the community influence being perceived as greater in their context. This was particularly observed among the older children who may play in a more unsupervised capacity in the community and then were reported to repeat homophobic language that they have heard there. This influence was repeated multiple times by both groups and perhaps reflected a helplessness staff feel in attempting to combat these issues under the influence of the wider community. These feelings of helplessness against the local community were shared by Ms Mohamud when discussing a reluctance to be open about her sexuality in the classroom:

> **Ms Mohamud:** *because I am aware that there are parents who could be, could have adverse feelings towards that and could make things more difficult. Because that's realistic, even though you wouldn't necessarily expect it to be realistic, it is, especially in the valleys.*

The researcher was struck by the participants repeated use of the work 'realistic' when reflecting on the need to protect her sexuality from parents. The researcher felt this

reflected the feeling of helplessness staff may be feeling towards changing things in their context. Again, this reflects the feeling shared by all participants that there is something fundamentally different about working within the South Wales Valleys, compared with other locations. The influence of community culture on schools is well documented in the literature with teachers reportedly adapting their pedagogy for fear of community backlash in the same way that Ms Mohamud was adapting the way she presented herself to the school community (Markland et al., 2022; McBride & Schubotz, 2017). The feelings experienced by participants highlight the power the community holds and the potential it has to enhance, or limit, the developmental potential of individuals (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). Bronfenbrenner (1986) reflected that CYP are affected by a plethora of settings, some of which they may never directly enter, but these external factors impact upon their psychological development. These influences are coined, 'the exosystem', and can be thought of as the context in which an individual develops (Bronfenbrenner, 1979).

This is a core sentiment of Bronfenbrenner's (1979) explanation of ecological systems theory in which he explains that within a given society the micro, meso and exo systems tend to be constructed in similar ways for all individuals. The experiences participants shared and reflected upon highlights the importance of creating links with the exosystem being developed and dynamic interaction between the exosystem and other systems being encouraged for developmental potential to be increased (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). To add, the effects of "trying to open them to seeing all different types of people" (Miss Morris) was hypothesised to have positive developmental effect according to Bronfenbrenner (1979). He suspected that being exposed to different cultural and subcultural contexts that are different from each other e.g., in terms of race, religion, age group and other background factors, would be developmentally beneficially. Miss Morris may therefore be describing positive progress in terms of her pedagogical practices to ensure inclusivity.

3.7 "We're on the right track" – the progress made

The focus groups afforded participants space to reflect upon the progress and positive changes they had made in recent years on their journey to dismantling some of the heteronormativity which may have previously been commonplace in their practice. Participants explored the passing of time, and how participants perceived this as resulting in positive changes to their pedagogy. Participants explored the progressive changes they felt had been made to their practices as well as to school policies. As such this theme has been labelled: "we're on the right track" – the progress made, as there was a generally feeling shared by participants of moving in the right direction:

> **Miss Morris:** *But generally speaking, I think, you know, we're on the right track. We're not there yet, but it's something we could look at further.*

The researcher was struck that the process of the focus group afforded participants this time to reflect when they perhaps had not before. As Miss Morris alluded to above, it gave an opportunity to judge where they were at on this journey, and what they may need to work on next. This highlights that positive power of conducting an open and honest conversation about this topic amongst staff teams, but increasing staff confidence in seeing that they are "on the right track" already. This reflective process was also seen in focus group two where participants reflected on past practices, and the positive changes they had made to their language use in the classroom:

> **Focus group 2:**
> **Miss Knight:** *I do think as well. You know, like years ago, you'd say, 'boys line up, girls line up', we wouldn't say that anymore and we haven't said that for a long, long time have we.*
> **Ms Mohamud:** *That's a good point, we have moved that forward.*
> **Miss Knight:** *[…] this is not a new thing but like, I, a long time ago would have said 'boys line up, girls line up', but for years now, it's always been 'line up if you're wearing grey trousers', or 'line up if you..', you know, we use 'if you've got a dog' […]*
> **Mrs Goodman***: I don't think I've actually mindfully thought of that before because I do use the terms boys and girls, but I, I haven't actually. I mean I do other things as well; I do a variety of things. But I don't think I've ever really, yeah, thought of it like that, and it's probably something, and it's not necessarily to do with that, but in terms of calling them your grownups rather than mum and dad.*
> **Ms Mohamud***: Yeh, I never say mums and dads, I say 'your mums, dad, nans, bamps, or whoever if picking you up today'.*
> **Miss Knight:** *Yeh, I always say that.*
> **Mrs Goodman:** *I quite like the term, 'your grownups', 'who's your grownups?', because that, that's just non, non-anything.*

The focus group process allowed the second focus group to recognise that they had generally moved away from using gendered language in some of their classroom practices, as Miss Knight reflected, they had moved on from saying "boys line up, girls line up". This initial noticing by Miss Knight, allowed the rest of the group to reflect on similar progressive changes that they had made to their language use in the classroom, such as moving away from using 'mums and dads' to using the term 'your grownups'. The conversational extract suggests that this was not a topic that staff members had previously discussed together as Mrs Goodman said, "I don't think I've actually mindfully thought of that before". This afforded her the opportunity to reflect on her use of the term 'boys and girls', in a way that she had not previously, perhaps due to a reluctance to discuss LGBTQ+ topics in school. This again shows the power of providing staff members with a safe space to reflect on their language use to think about how they might make positive changes towards disrupting heteronormativity. Mx Jones, as a Head Teacher, was also about to reflect upon the progressive changes that had been made to the schools' uniform policy in recent years:

> **Mx Jones:** *We did things like in the school prospectus, under school uniform, it used to be this is the boys uniform, this is the girls uniform, now we just say this is the uniform these are suggested things, and we don't sort of label it boys and girls, we just say bottoms, skirts, pinafores, trousers, shorts, you know we just put them as a one list we don't say this is for boys and this is for girls.*

 Mx Jones shared that the school no longer lists uniforms options under 'boys' and 'girls' but instead offers general suggestions. This was an inclusive and relatively simple step for this setting to make, and the focus group afforded them the opportunity to reflect on how that change may have been a step toward dismantling some of the heteronormative practices that may have been commonplace in the past. Again, it was reflected that there might be a pride felt amongst participants when afforded the chance to reflect upon the progressive changes that had been making in this area, thus potentially offering an improvement in mindset and confidence in tackling LGBTQ+ issues.

The overriding theme of change that participants discussed here was reflective of the chronosystem in Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). The chronosystem was added in 1986 and allows us to consider that things change over time due to the development of societies (Bronfenbrenner, 1986). This allows us to consider that CYP are at the centre of a system that is influenced by the continual changes that are occurring within the environment in which they are living. The progression discussed, perhaps as a result of societal developments, suggests that schools are becoming more aware of gender and sexuality diversity. This may not have been something that they were even consciously aware of, but given the opportunity to reflect, participants were able to offer suggestions about how they had started their journey toward disrupting heteronormativity. This is reflective of the literature which suggests that in general, schools are becoming more aware of gender and sexuality diversity and the influence that heteronormativity may play in education settings (Atkinson, 2021; DePalma & Atkinson, 2010). It is this awareness amongst staff teams that results in schools becoming more welcoming and inclusive spaces, as a result of

small changes, such as those shared by Mx Jones, about creating an inclusive uniform policy (Stonewall, 2017). The literature even suggests that these inclusive changes are resulting in a reduction in incidences of HTBH bullying (McCormack & Anderson, 2010; McCormack, 2012; Stonewall, 2017). Schools may therefore do well to include the changes to language and uniform policy the participants discussed, as a small, cost-free change that could result in a more welcoming school environments for LGBTQ+ pupils.

4.0 A (bio)ecological systems perspective

Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979, 1986; Bronfenbrenner and Ceci, 1994) has been referenced throughout the analysis as a means of helping make sense of the results of the TA. This highlights the systemic influence of heteronormativity that influences the individual children at the centre of these systems. This is a model that is taught of part of teacher training courses in the UK and may therefore be supportive to visualise the themes discussed using this model to aid the understanding of education staff. This is helpfully visualised below, in figure 5. As highlighted throughout the findings, particularly in the theme 'seeing outside the bubble' the interactions between these different systems is essential for there to be successful progress made towards disrupting heteronormativity in school systems and beyond.
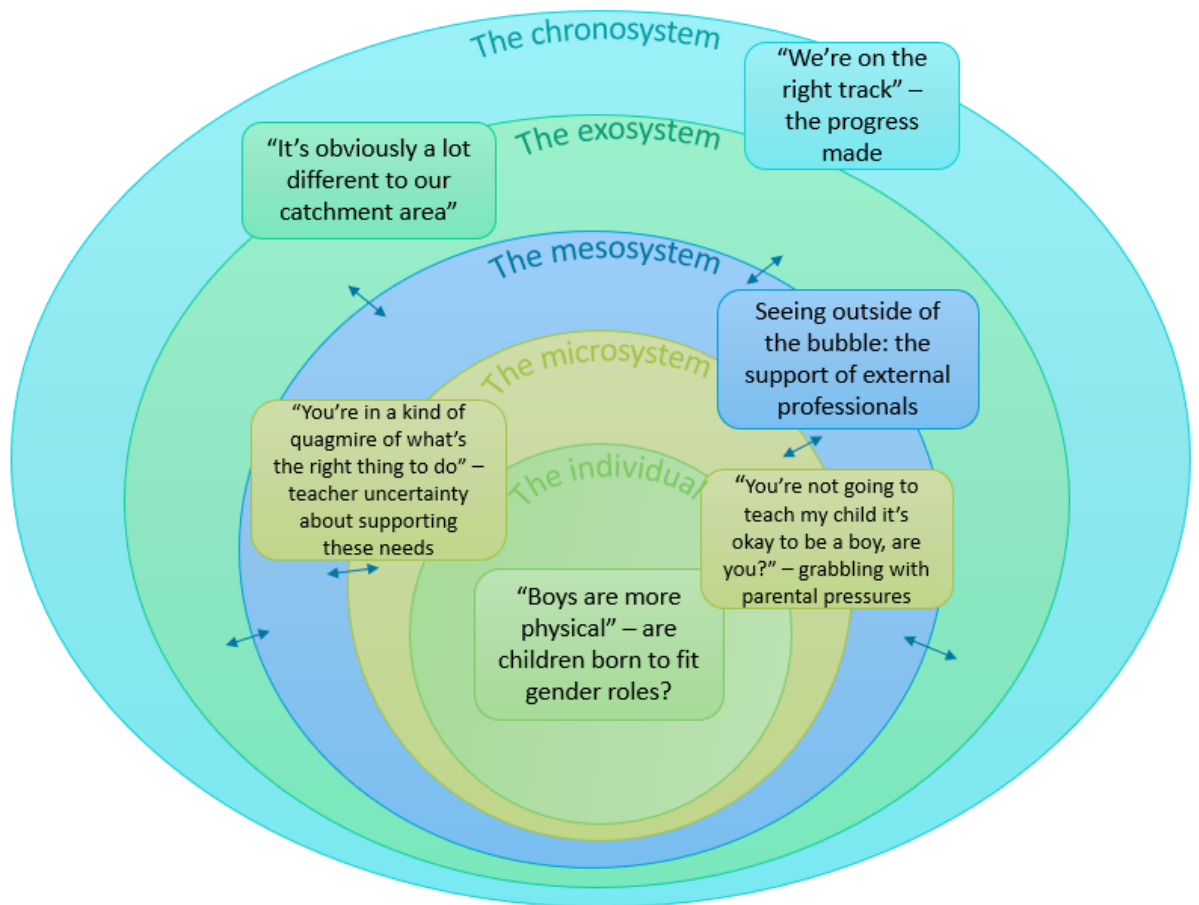
Figure 6; themes visualised as part of Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory

5.0 Implications

5.1 Implication for educational psychologists

When the above themes and subthemes are considered, more specifically '"we don't have enough training on it"' and 'seeing outside of the bubble: the support of external professionals', it seems that participants desire the support of external professionals to help them engage in the complexities of dismantling heteronormativity in schools. The literature outlines repeatedly how this work can support the wellbeing and emotional development of CYP, especially those who identify at LGBTQ+ (Johnson, 2022; Yavuz, 2016). In their role, EPs work with CYP, education settings and wider systems, such as Local Authorities, to support well-being, learning and social and emotional development (AEP/WG, 2016); they may therefore be well placed to support schools with this work. The support participants suggested was at multiple levels of the EP role, including the individual, group/school and wider system/LA level (AEP/WG, 2016); how this work may be conducted is discussed below.

Firstly, at the individual level, participants discussed a desire for reassurance and support with individual cases, including supporting with the communication between the home and the school. A consultation model could be beneficial here as it would allow collaborative problem solving with school staff and/or families and facilitate the creative coping skills of consultees (Wagner, 2000; 2017). This approach could also be extended to group consultations within school clusters to increase communication between systems and allowing settings to share knowledge and best practices, alongside collaborative problem solving (Charlton, 2020; Wagner, 2000; 2017). In this way the role of the EP can be considered akin to the mesosystem, increasing the connectedness between different settings and systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In models such as these, EPs may act as a critical friend to schools and encourage them to reflect upon their own practices around gender norms and stereotypes; much like the participants here were afforded space to do during the focus groups. Through this, a process of equifinality may begin, a process that occurs in open systems, by which the

same eventual goal (of disrupting heteronormativity) can be reached in a variety of differing ways (Dallos & Draper, 2015). As such, the change process may begin through the facilitation of conversations about this subject matter, with school settings finding their own, differing, ways to the end goal.

Participants also referenced a willingness to learn more in this area and expressed a desire for further training to inform their work. As part of this, addressing appropriate language is essential and may be a good place to start. This may have the power to go some way to alleviating some of the fear participants expressed about saying the wrong thing and appearing 'bigoted'. This would be in line with Stonewall's (2017a) recommendation for schools to work collaboratively with their local authorities and to equip staff with appropriate LGBTQ+ inclusive language. Despite participants stating that training from an external professional, such as an EP, would be helpful, there is potential for EPs to work more systemically by encouraging schools to challenge heteronormativity by dismantling the gendered structures that are central to their school system. This work at a systemic level could include the development of inclusive policies to create more welcoming school environments (Drury et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022; Sill, 2022). Although participants here (particularly those from focus group 2) seemed to be engaged in some of this work already (addressing the language they use and adapting their uniform policies) this may not yet be the case for all schools (Stonewall, 2017a). If EPs supported schools to challenge heteronormativity by thinking beyond the gender binary (e.g., with regards to toilets, uniforms, and PE lessons) pupils would have the potential to see beyond norms of masculinity and femininity which are used to rationalise boys' physical, and sometimes violent, behaviour (Drury et al., 2022; Ringrose & Renold, 2010). This has the potential impact to improve attendance and academic outcomes of queer CYP, as well as reducing HBTH bullying, which would have significant impacts on CYP's mental health and wellbeing (Yavuz, 2016).

The analysis presented above is richly contextualised, with participants making several references to their local context being different to other areas; this was highlighted in the theme 'it's different 'round here: the influence of the exosystem'. This emphasised

the importance of EPs being aware of local cultures and knowing the community in which they are working well. Although knowledge of how EPs might use community psychology is limited, research suggests the importance of considering the different values of teachers, CYP and communities when approaching this kind of work (Taft, Woods & Ford, 2020). Knowing the community in which you are working is considered a strength of EP practice, and this could be utilised further to encourage community cohesion by strengthening connections between settings and systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; Taft et al., 2020). Taft et al. (2020) suggest drawing on psychological models such as social identity theory to inform this work and to support engagement with community systems. This could help schools navigate the parental backlash participants discussed above. In this way it may be possible to stop parents from seeing the disruption of heteronormativity, and LGBTQ+ inclusivity, as a threat to the 'in-group' status of their local communities (Tajfel, Turner, Austin and Worchel, 1979).

Before considering embarking on this work, it is important to consider there may be a lack of awareness among EPs themselves; with research suggesting that EPs often lack understanding of gender issues (Bowskill, 2017; Charlton, 2020). EPs should therefore consider engaging in CPD to ensure they are well equipped to support schools in this area and enable change for queer CYP (Bowskill, 2017; Charlton, 2020; Court, 2019; Marks, 2012). This is supported by the British Psychological Society (BPS) in their document 'Guidelines for psychologists working with gender, sexuality and relationship diversity' (2019), where they propose that practitioner psychologists seek training around gender variance. This may also be pertinent to DEdPsy courses to ensure all newly qualified EPs are competent to support in this area and thus adhering to the ethical guidelines to which they are constrained (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2015).

5.2 Implications for school staff and beyond

The research suggests that schools need the support of external agencies to engage with the complexities of dismantling heteronormativity. However, as the participants in this study illustrated, there are changes schools can begin to make on their own

(such as, considering language use and making changes to uniform policies). Taking time to reflect on the language used, like the participants in the present study, and making simple switches to gender neutral terms, as opposed to 'boys and girls', or the phrase 'grownups' as opposed to 'mums and dads', is a suggested first step (Abbott et al., 2015). This could be extended to include the teaching of the singular pronoun 'they', alongside teaching 'he' and 'she', to offer pupils the option of using non-gender specific language; this could be taught in the context of addressing a person whose gender and preferred pronouns they do not know (Bollas, 2021). Bronfenbrenner (1979) highlights the importance of all members of the system engaging in joint activity; in this way a whole school approach could be developed. Developing a whole school approach and considering the culture of their setting would allow staff to move beyond tackling individual incidences of HBTH bullying and allow them to consider what about their system facilitates this behaviour to occur (Dowling & Osborne, 1994). In this way school would begin the process of moving away from viewing HBTH bullying as an individualised problem, and toward addressing the heteronormative culture that allows it to occur though the systemic influence of gender and sexuality norms (Abbot et al., 2015; Carlile, 2020; Llewellyn, 2022; Hall, 2020).

The participants reflected upon some of the activities that they felt pupils were 'naturally' 'more inclined' to engage with; this included the home corner and small world construction areas. Lyttleton-Smith (2019) suggests 'de-zoning' such activities within the classroom to reduce the gender power of such zones. This is a simple shift that teachers could make which may support the breaking of links between gender and particular activities. Lyttleton-Smith (2019) posits that disrupting things in this way will support children whose interests do not fit the binary pattern and will enable greater freedom of expression. In addition to this, the participants discussed a desire for the inclusion of a wider range of books within the classroom but did not know where to access such books. The charity Stonewall offers several lists of age-appropriate LGBTQ+ books on their website where teachers may wish to begin. If buying an array of new books is not an option Bollas (2021) suggests the inclusion of questioning that encourages pupils to think critically about the books and resources, they are presented with. These questions could include 'who writes these texts?', 'how

might this effect your LGBTQ+ peers?', or 'does this reflect our society?' (Bollas, 2021). This would be a free, simple shift that would encourage the development of a gender critical pedagogy.

Although some simple shifts for school staff have been suggested, as mentioned above, it is likely that the support of an external professional is required to support schools to engage in the complexities of this work (Court, 2019; Markland et al., 2022). To begin, initial teacher training could mandate good quality sexualities and gender education, with the support of external professionals, to ensure that all new qualified teachers are equipped with the language and knowledge to begin the complex work of disrupting heteronormativity (van Leet, 2016).

6.0 Strengths and limitations of the present study

Perceived strengths	Perceived limitations
1. The focus groups conducted as part of the study afforded 10 practitioners with the opportunity to critically reflect on their work and where they are on their journey towards disrupting heteronormativity. Following the completion of both focus groups participants went away with new ideas about what they could do next. It is possible that the focus group itself was an important part of the change process. 1.2 The focus group also allowed participants to reflect on the	1. The data presented here is richly contextualised due to its location in the South Wales Valleys. Whether, and to what extent, this information can be transferred to other settings, should therefore be made at the discretion of the reader. 2. Participants were known to the researcher prior to the focus group taking place; this may have influenced their participation in the study. 3. The focus group methodology used may have resulted in some participants feeling more reluctant

positive steps toward change that they had already made.	to speak due to group hierarchies and dynamics.
2. The present study offered a thought-provoking connection to Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory in considering how schools, with the support of EPs, may being the work of challenging heteronormativity.	4. Due to the time constraints that this research was bound by the researcher was unable to revisit participants to clarify findings and ensure their voices were accurately captured.
	5. This research was completed to meet requirements of a doctoral level qualification. Research may therefore be considered a secondary skill of the researcher who has an evolving knowledge of conducting research, facilitating focus groups, and using reflexive thematic analysis (this, along with my positionality, is reflected on further in Section C of this thesis).

Table 4 – strengths and limitations of the present study

7.0 Further research avenues

1. Two of the participants (one from each focus group) were in same-sex marriages and discussed the impact of school-based heteronormativity on them during the focus groups. Unfortunately, further exploration of this was outside of the scope of the present research and did not directly relate to the research question presented. It may therefore be of interest to explore further in future research, especially given the context of the current study which appeared to have had a significant impact upon the present results.

2. An exploration of the 'macro-system' (to use Bronfenbrenner's term) was beyond the scope of this research. It would be of interest to explore the impact of government legislation and policy on school-based heteronormativity, in this context, as part of future research.

3. This author began to explore the 'chronosystem' as a theme from this analysis, but felt it was not related to the present research question (see appendices N and O and part 2.7 of section C for further exploration of this). This idea began to explore the perceived progress made by teachers in this area, as well as exploring the idea of age, and at what age it is appropriate to introduce LGBTQ+ topics to CYP. This author believes that this area would benefit from further exploration to build upon current literature which explores the progress that has been made in this area (e.g., McCormack, 2012; McCormack & Anderson, 2010).

4. The literature explored suggests that EPs working with schools to disrupt heteronormativity is an area currently in its infancy (Charlton, 2020; Court, 2019). Further research to explore what guidance and training is available to EPs to support schools with this work would therefore be of value.

5. The analysis provided here was richly contextualised and highlighted the importance of EPs knowing the community in which they are working well. Further research into how EPs could utilise community psychology to increase community cohesion may be of interest (Taft et al., 2020); especially when the parental and community backlash participants experienced is considered.

6. This research focused on one LA within the South Wales Valleys, it would be of interest to explore these topics in other localities within Wales, particularly North Wales.

8.0 Summary

This research used a focus group methodology to offer an in-depth exploration of primary school teachers' perceptions of heteronormativity within their schools in Wales. During the process of reflexive thematic analysis, a link to Bronfenbrenner's

(bio)ecological systems was made. This deepened the analysis and highlighted the need to engage systems at all levels to support in the complexities of the work of disrupting heteronormativity within school systems. The themes, and more specifically the contradictory subthemes, highlight the complexity of this issue, and the multiple different positions that teachers may hold simultaneously about this subject. This highlights that this work is not easy, and teachers often feel a perceived, or real, threat from external factors, such as parental backlash, when grappling with topics like LGBTQ+ inclusivity within the curriculum. The research provides some considerations for the work of EPs, school staff and beyond, and a key finding suggests developing an increased connectedness within and between systems. EPs have the potential to play a facilitating role here in supporting schools to engage in the work of disrupting heteronormativity in their settings. It is therefore hoped that these considerations offer a starting place form which education professionals may begin the work of disrupting heteronormativity in primary schools.

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"You don't want to get anything wrong. That's the trouble isn't it": Exploring primary school teachers' constructions of heteronormativity in schools in Wales.

Section C: Critical Appraisal

Word count: 6,637

1.0 Introduction

This critical appraisal aims to give a reflexive and reflective account of my research process. I have chosen to write in the first person and offer extracts from my research diary during the presentation of this appraisal, which will be is discussed in two parts: 1. A critical account of the development of the research practitioner and 2. Contribution to knowledge. During the first part of the appraisal, I will reflect upon the origins of the research, along with the decisions made at each stage of the research development. In part two I will reflect upon my perceptions of the implications for professional practice as well as the relevance of the findings to existing and future research.

2.0 A critical account of the development of the research practitioner

2.1 Origin of the research topic

My interest in pursuing this area of research was personal. As a person who only discovered their pan/bisexuality as an adult, I was curious about what had caused me not to explore this aspect of my sexuality. I had felt more comfortable in queer spaces for a long time, and have a lot of gay friends, but had always assumed that I was straight because I was attracted to members of the opposite sex. As I began to have this realisation about my own sexuality, I was at the initial stages of the DEdPsy and was learning more about social constructionism. Social constructionism affords us to take a critical stance towards taken for granted knowledge (Burr, 2015). This means that the categories that humans are divided into, such as sex, gender, and sexuality, may not represent real divisions; there may in fact by a multitude of ways in which a human being may wish to categorise themselves. This piqued my interest, and I was interested to learn more about social constructionism and its relevance to gender and sexuality.

Exploring social constructionism further coincided with my writing of an academic assignment which sought to explore how EPs can support transgender CYP. Through writing this assignment and a brief exploration of the research I stumbled across the term 'heteronormativity' for the first time through the work of DePalma & Atkinson (2009; 2010) and had my 'ah-ha!' moment. I suddenly felt like I understood myself for the first time. It was this process of heteronormativity that I experience in society and had experienced through my schooling that had perhaps resulted in me only exploring the more 'socially acceptable' parts of my sexuality. This discovery prompted me to reflect upon the human need to categorise things, such as gender and sexuality. This is prominently seen in institutions, like schools, where the gender binary is perpetuated and sexuality norms continue to be reproduced through the use of gendered toilets and uniforms (as well as a multitude of other factors) (DePalma & Jennett, 2010; Bragg, Renold, Ringrose & Jackson, 2018; Atkinson, 2021; Markland, Sargeant &

Wright, 2022). These factors combined, resulted in my interest being piqued in this area and I began exploring literature related to education and heteronormativity but struggled to find anything specific to the role of the EP. Although, literature was found that explored how EPs might support trans/gender variant CYP (Bowskill, 2017; Yavuz, 2016), there was a dearth of research exploring how EPs might disrupt the wider systemic issue of heteronormativity in schools. I therefore became interested in how EPs might be able to support schools in dismantling the heteronormativity that is so engrained within institutions and move towards the creation of more inclusive environments. To do this, I felt that it was essential to gain the perspectives of teachers so that we might better understand where they are on this journey to ensure that any implications were meeting teachers where they were at, rather than pitching things that are too complex, or too simple. Furthermore, I wanted to explore this issue in the Welsh context, due to the dearth of literature in this geographic area, but also due to the worrying statistics that show that HBTH bullying is a greater issue in Welsh schools when compared to all other parts of the UK (Stonewall, 2017).

2.2 Reflecting on my position

Prior to conducing this research project my personal position was affected by the competition of academic assignments (discussed above), and through the process of the completing the major literature (section A). Following these, I had developed a construction of schools as central to the (re)production of heteronormativity in society. This position would have undoubtably shaped my practices, particularly during analysis. Within other research paradigms, this may be considered bias, however, within qualitative research methods, and within reflexive thematic analysis more specifically, this subjectivity is valued (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Braun & Clarke's (2021) introduction of the term *reflexive* to this method of analysis emphasises the importance of this subjectivity as a resource during the analytic process. My own subjectivity was not therefore seen as something that required management, instead a reflexive research journal was used to reflect upon my assumptions, decisions, to record discussions with my research supervisor, and to acknowledge my own subjectivity (extracts from this are given throughout the appraisal) (Braun & Clarke,

2022). It is for this reason that a second researcher was not used to create 'inter-rater reliability' during coding and theme development, as research subjectivity offers insight that may be lost through processes of inter-rater checks; this is seen as a strength of this research project.

2.3 Conducting the literature review

As a cohort we found the concept of conducting such a thorough literature review daunting. It was a new skill, and most of us felt that we had little relevant experience to prepare us for undertaking this kind of research. We therefore sought out the input of the Cardiff University library service in the Summer of 2022. This was beneficial in developing my skills in navigating the multiple different databases that I would need to undertake my literature search.

The first hurdle I had to overcome was deciding what kind of literature review would best meet my needs when considering my chosen research topic. Through reading I began to grapple with some of the subtle differences that separated narrative and systematic literature reviews. Initially, a narrative review was considered, however through further reading, my understanding is that these reviews are generally conducted to bring together studies on different topics in order for reinterpretation (Siddaway, Wood & Hedges, 2018). As I knew there was a fairly substantial number of articles related to this topic, I felt that I was not bringing together studies on differing subjects together. In addition, my reading led me to understand that a higher degree of bias present in narrative reviews as the methodology of literature retrieval is less robust (Green, 2006). As I had reflected frequently, both alone, and with my research

Research diary extract: Systematic literature reviews aim to minimise subjectivity + bias – this is what I need!!

supervisor, about my own biases in this research area (as discussed when reflecting on my positioning above), I felt that a systematic review would therefore be more appropriate (Siddaway et al., 2018). Although my own subjectivity is seen as a strength of the major empirical study, I wanted to first gain access to all relevant literature. I felt that the methodical search strategies used as part of a systematic search would afford me this

in a way that would minimise my subjective bias. I was hopeful that this would help me in gaining a balanced view before undertaking my empirical research.

I found the methodical and comprehensive nature of conducting a systematic review eased my anxiety somewhat as the task was broken down into more manageable sections (Siddaway et al., 2018). First, I had to determine what my search terms would be. Having undertaken a scoping search of the literature when completing my thesis proposal, I was familiar with the variety of terms that have been used in the literature, this was helpful in deciding my search terms. I also has an initial idea as to how I would include/exclude papers, however, this was revisited and reflected upon as I carried out the review, as suggested by Siddaway et al., (2018). As such, I added in the inclusion criteria 'relevance to education', due to a proportion of health-related studies coming up in my searches.

As I was aware that searching through electronic databases alone can cause important literature to be missed (Greenhalgh & Peacock, 2005), snowballing was used to pick up any relevant papers from reference lists. Efforts were also made to ensure the inclusion of relevant unpublished materials through a search of unpublished doctoral theses from Cardiff University. A connection was also made with a professional tutor from Southampton University who leads a sexuality and gender research group, which although based in Southampton, has connections with other DEdPsy courses across England. Through this connection I was put in contact with several researchers who had conducted their doctoral theses on areas similar to me. I reached out to all these researchers multiple times and connected with one whose unpublished (soon to be published) work offered invaluable insights in both my literature review and empirical study.

Supervision during literature review process was invaluable in determining how I was going to structure the review. I knew setting the historical and contextual scene was important, but I did not know how to make this fit with my thematic synthesis of the literature. In addition, I felt historical information, such as Section 28 were essential to include, but did not fit with my inclusion and exclusion criteria. This was when I settled on the idea of presenting review in two parts; through which the reader if offered the essential background information in part one to make sense of the thematic synthesis presented in part two.

Research diary extract: Contextualising before offering my main themes – this seems to be the way to go!

2.4 Methodological considerations

2.4.1 Ontology and epistemology

The aim of this research was to explore primary school teachers' perceptions of heteronormativity in their schools in Wales. Before beginning to explore this, I had to consider my ontological and epistemological positioning. Ontology refers to what it is that we think we know about the world, and epistemology refers to how we think we know it (Braun & Clarke, 2022). There is an order of influence here, whereby ontology supersedes epistemology which in turn supersedes methodology (this is displayed in figure 2). Prior to studying on this course, I was most familiar with quantitative research from my undergraduate degree which held a realist ontological and positivist epistemological position. In this way the research I was familiar with reading offered statistical analyses which attempted to offer the *truth* about a given topic. Upon beginning the DEdPsy course, I became more familiar with qualitative research which offered a relativist ontological position, which conceptualises reality as the product of human action and interaction; a single reality does not therefore exist independent of human practices (Braun & Clarke, 2022). I found learning about this of interest, as it seemed to align more with my personal values than the realist positions I had been more familiar with. This appeared to be in line with the aims of the research and would

acknowledge that participants would have a multitude of ways to interpret heteronormativity and its relevance to primary school settings.

Building on this, the DEdPsy course as Cardiff University teaches the Constructionist Model of Informed and Reasoned Action (COMOIRA) (Gameson & Rhydderch, 2017). COMOIRA holds social constructionism at its core, and this epistemological stance holds that knowledge is constructed through language in historical and cultural contexts (Burr, 2015; Gameson & Rhydderch, 2017). In this respect language is seen as key to understanding and plays an active role in creating one's reality (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Considering language as an active agent for creating meaning seemed important when considering I was going to be working in school systems where staff members were likely to hold different constructions about heteronormativity. I felt this was even more likely to be true given the potentially controversial nature of the research topic and was interested to see how these constructions might be formed within a focus group methodology. To offer contrast, adopting a positivist position would posit a straightforward relationship between the world and one's perception of this; there is therefore one objective truth (Willig, 2013). This did not fit with my assumptions about the perceptions of primary school teachers when discussing heteronormativity. I did not believe that one, unified, truth would emerge from the focus groups, and taking such an epistemological stance would not therefore align with my aims for this project.

2.4.2   Development of the research question

During the initial stages of this project, including the proposal stage, I had one primary research question, along with three secondary research questions. I grappled with these questions frequently and felt that they were perhaps constricting the research too

> **Research diary extract:**
> It's okay to just have one research question – why am I overcomplicating this?!

much. I was able to reflect on this through the process of supervision and in the end, I decided on one broad and open-ended research question, which I felt suited the exploratory nature of this research project. This was in line with Braun & Clarke's

(2022) guidance for developing a research question. In their guidance they discuss that although the question may be loose and broad, it should mesh "together consideration of the wider context, existing empirical scholarship, and scope and potential of the dataset" (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 41). I feel that '*how is heteronormativity in schools viewed by primary school teachers in Wales?*' offered such 'meshing' by considering the Welsh context, the concept of heteronormativity in schools which was well documented in the literature, as well as giving scope for what might emerge from my focus groups, without overcomplicating things with multiple secondary questions. I felt that this also reflected the freedom I wanted to afford participants in the focus groups so that conversation was free to flow in any direction the participants chose. I felt that having the three secondary questions may result in me feeling as though I had to steer the conversation in certain directions because I was constrained to answering all research questions.

2.5   Participants

2.5.1 Inclusion and exclusion criteria

A purposeful sampling method was used to ensure that participants would be able to offer information rich data (Braun & Clarke, 2013). In addition to this I chose to add the inclusion criteria that participants had had at least one year's teaching experience. This decision was made through reflections on my own experience of teacher training and being a newly qualified teacher (NQT). I had not covered any topics related to heteronormativity during my initial teacher training and therefore felt it was unlikely for an NQT to be familiar with this topic's relevance to education. As such, I decided that it would be necessary for staff to have had access to training and/or continued professional development (CPD) to increase their likelihood of being able to offer information rich data through the focus group process.

It was also decided that focus groups would consist of teachers from pre-existing groups in attempt to increase feelings of safety among participants. As a result, some participants held different roles within their systems (see Table 3). It was therefore

essential as moderator that I was aware of potential power dynamics that might play out in the focus group, in order to ensure I could step in and ensure that all participants had opportunity to contribute. Although I was aware of this going into the focus group, holding different roles within the school system did not appear to affect focus group participation in either focus group.

2.5.2   Recruitment

Braun and Clarke (2013) discuss the importance of using some kind of advertising in order to recruit participants; this was done through the use of a recruitment poster (appendix D). This recruitment poster was shared with all EPs in the EPS and EPs were asked to share the poster with their link schools during the initial planning visits at the beginning of the academic year. Through this process I hoped that I would be able to recruit up to three focus groups, due to the size and scope of this research project. The recruitment window was left open for the first half of the autumn term to allow all EPs to conduct their planning meetings with all their schools. Although this process limited recruitment to teachers working in the South Wales Valleys, and not Wales as a whole, recruiting within the LA in which I was working afforded me greater opportunity to develop relationships with participants to ensure they felt safe to share during the focus group. It also allowed me to check-in with participants throughout the academic year in case they were affected by the focus group process, and if they wanted to discuss any of these topics further. This was something that I found particularly powerful, and one of the schools ask me to support them in developing their school policies to become more inclusive of gender and sexuality during the next academic year.

Through this process I was able to recruit two focus groups. I think it was interest that both groups recruited from schools in my own 'cluster'. I think this is reflective of the need for participants to feel safe to open up in the focus group about the potentially sensitive subject of heteronormativity. This is something that I had considered in wanting to ensure that participants were known to each other. However, it was not a factor that I had considered would affect recruitment. On reflection, it would have

been helpful to make myself known to all schools and increase connections to foster feelings of safety with other schools. In this way I may have been able to recruit from schools, outside of my own school cluster. I think the difficulties in recruiting from this participant pool also highlight the challenges of working with teachers, who are already under significant pressure in their jobs, and do not have much flexibility, or additional time, to participate in research. This resulted in some schools dismissing the idea of participating before they had even heard much about what the research process was, or what the research was about.

2.6 Conducting the focus groups

In line with my ontological and epistemological positioning, focus groups were chosen as the method of data collection for this project. It was hoped that this would take some of the artificiality out of the situation, when compared with interviews, and it was hoped the supportive and open nature of a focus group would mimic real life conversation (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although conducting FGs with pre-existing groups could be seen to act as a barrier to the open

> **Extract from research diary:**
> I was surprised (in FG1) by how open and honest they were so quickly. Is this the impact of having a safe, known, group?

discussion or disclosure (Braun & Clarke, 2013); this was outweighed by the need to focus a sense of safety within the group. This was felt to be of particular importance when considering the sensitive nature of the topic at hand and a desire to make participants feel as comfortable as possible. Snacks were also provided to facilitate conversation and put participants at ease (Braun & Clarke, 2013). When reflecting following the focus groups (as shown in the above extract), I believe that these efforts were successful, and participants were quick to be open and honest in their conversation with each other.

Although my subjectivity as a researcher is considered a strength of the analytic process (as explored above in 2.2), this was something I was conscious of during the process of facilitating the focus groups. I was aware that I was holding several different roles during this time as research and facilitator, but also as TEP. I was known to the

participants as their school's link psychologist and I was aware that they would see me as such during the focus group process and could potentially ask me questions, or look for guidance, during the focus group. To navigate these blurred lines, I was sure to clearly outline the focus group process before the recording began to ensure participants were clear that I was not there in an advisory capacity (a capacity they may otherwise be used to seeing me in). I also had to be extremely mindful during the focus group process not to jump in with my own suggestions and let the group conversation flow. This was challenging as I am a nature people pleaser with a desire to help others. I overcame this by following up with participants after the focus group had finished (for example, with book suggestions, as this is something focus group two reflected that they wanted more information on).

Access to supervision between facilitating the focus groups was a helpful reflective space in which to discuss the process of the focus group, my role as facilitator, and my perceived usefulness of the questions asked. One key factor discussed during this session was my frustration that once the first focus group came to an end and I had

Extract from research diary: When do you stop recording?!

stopped the recording, the participants began to speak again and shared some useful information that I was disappointed not to catch on the recording. This frustration can be seen in the diary extract to the left. My supervisor was helpful in reassuring me during this session that turning off the recording likely changed the dynamic of the group, and perhaps the action of stopping the recording caused participants to share things that they perhaps did not feel comfortable sharing on record. This reflective space was key to easing my anxiety that I had done something wrong here.

One unexpected and pleasing outcome from the focus groups was the potential for them to act as an intervention in their own right. Following completion of the first focus group I received an email from one of the participants (an extract of which is given to the right) explaining how the focus group had prompted the group to continue discussing the topic long after I had left the building. This was reiterated when I arrived at the school to complete the second focus group when one of

> ***Response from member of focus group 1:***
> "Thank you for yesterday...staff were talking for a good hour afterward about how much they enjoyed the process 🙂"

the participants explained to me that she was excited to partake because a participant from focus group one had told her that it had been an interesting experience. Participants were therefore reflecting on the topic of heteronormativity both within and between groups. This is reflective of the "consciousness-raising effect" that focus groups can have among participants (Braun & Clarke, 2013). It is for this reason that they are particularly useful when research has an activist intent (Braun & Clarke, 2013). Although this is not an intent I consciously had when beginning the project, on reflection I believe the research does have activist intent and I will consider the use of this methodology in my future EP practice when wanting to discuss issues of social justice with both colleagues and stakeholders.

2.7 Analysis

When considering my analytical method, I was first drawn to discourse analysis due to my interest in the use of language by participants due to the documented fear among teachers about getting the language *right*. Discourse analysis has a history in the field of sexuality and is concerned with discovering socially patterned meaning (Willig, 2013), which I felt may help make sense of the social phenomenon of heteronormativity. Discourse analysis is concerned with how people think, feel, and how they might act (Willig, 2013). Due to the time constraints of this project, and the limited time of my participants, I would not be able to check in with participants following analysis to check that I had accurately documented how they thought, felt, and acted in the focus group and beyond. I did not, therefore, feel that I could ethically

carry out such an analysis. As such, reflexive thematic analysis (RTA) was considered as it afforded me the flexibility to consider the use of language in my analysis, whilst also valuing my subjective position, in a way that discourse analysis could not (Braun & Clarke, 2022). This was considered particularly important when reflecting upon my positioning, and when considering the value given to research subjectivity, making it especially well-suited to single researchers (Braun & Clarke, 2022). To add, RTA affords theoretical flexibility, meaning it could be used from my relativist, and social constructionist, ontological and epistemological positioning (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

Relativist RTA allowed me to explore the multiple realities that would exist within my focus groups (Braun & Clarke, 2022). It doesn't frame one of the realities as truer than another, and it respected that there would be no singular reality of what heteronormativity is and how it is, or is not, relevant in these settings. As such my analysis offers just one account of the data, it is not true, but my analysis offers the reader my meaning making and why I believe it matters. This is in line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) explanation of social constructionist RTA, which they describe as *producing*, rather than revealing evidence. Using RTA in this way allowed me to acknowledge the importance of knowledge as historically and culturally constituted (Burr, 2015). I felt this came to be increasingly important as the data analysis took place and the significance of the local context and culture of the participants' schools came into fruition.

At the first stage of the analysis, I gave myself time to complete multiple listens to the focus group recordings with time spent walking between listens to offer myself "headspace" (Braun & Clarke, 2021, p. 332) to dwell on the dataset. Braun & Clarke (2021; 2022) state the importance of this time and space as an important step in the analytical process and can help develop nuanced analysis. As highlighted in the left diary extract, this process took a lot longer than I was expecting but affording myself this time to get to know the dataset was invaluable for later stages of the analysis.

> *Extract from research diary:*
> Reflection – immersion takes ages!!
> This is taking much longer than I expected.

At the initial stage of the analysis, I presented my research journey (so far) to peers on the DEdPsy training programme at Cardiff University. Putting together this presentation was a helpful step during analysis, and process of articulating what I was discovering aloud was valuable in discovering where parts of my analysis were a little thin and needed further development. Discussing my work and answering questions from the group was effective in ascertaining how clearly I understood my data. This was a helpful step before further engagement in the analysis, and the eventual write up.

Following this process, the themes were developed as a means of creating shared meaning from the codes and codes labels (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Theme *development*, as opposed to theme *identification*, highlights the active role the researcher plays in the analytic process (Braun & Clarke, 2022). The process of creating the initial themes is shown in appendices L and M. They were organised around key, recurrent, ideas that originated in the transcripts. Appendix M shows an extract form my research diary during this time and illustrates how a link to (bio)ecological systems theory was made following the development of my initial themes. This theory, along with other literature, was used to deepen analytical understanding of the themes. As shown in the left extract, use of theory was key to the analysis and the more I read Bronfenbrenner's original works, the more I felt my analysis deepen. Using theory in this way was also beneficial when considering applications and implications of the findings. This is in line with Braun & Clarke's (2022) guidelines for RTA, in which they stress the importance of connecting "your analytic interpretation to the scholarly fields your work is situated in" (p. 129).

> *Extract from research diary:*
> Reflection – the more I read Bronfenbrenner's original work, the more I feel like my analysis is coming together

When going through the key quotes (appendix O) I felt that it was imperative to represent the interactive nature of the focus group to offer the reader a better understanding of how the themes developed. As such, data extracts contained conversation between participants, as well than individual quotes. I feel that this made

quite powerful reading in the empirical study, and I feel it reflects the social constructionist stance of this research. My course peers were invaluable sounding boards during this period and were supportive in clarifying whether data extracts used were illustrating core meaning of the theme. Use of peers in this way is in line with Braun & Clarke's (2022) guidelines for conducting RTA.

As I was writing section B, my analysis continued, and it was following the completion of my first draft that I made the decision to let go of the sixth theme. This was then readded following the competition of my Viva, and I feel the theme offers valuable insights into the positive changes and progress teachers had been able to make, fairly easily, towards disrupting heteronormativity. Working, and reworking, themes in this way, is in line with Braun and Clarke's (2022) guidance for conducting RTA, and they describe the write up as a process of "deep *refining* analytic work" (p. 118). "Being prepared to let things go" is a key part of the theme development process in RTA (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 100), but it was very challenging to make this decisions. Access to supervision was key here, as well as going back to Braun and Clarke's original works and YouTube channel to ensure I was doing justice to the RTA model. Although challenging, I am pleased with the final analysis as it is presented in Section B and am hopeful that it offers some interesting insights on the subject of heteronormativity in primary schools.

3.0 Contribution to Knowledge

3.1 Relevance of research findings to existing knowledge

The aim of this research was to gain primary school teachers' perspectives of the influence of heteronormativity in their education settings in Wales. This builds upon the considerable literature (presented in Section A) that explores the influence of heteronormativity in education-based settings. This is in line with what Braun & Clarke (2022) describe as the 'making an argument' model of qualitative research, as opposed to the 'establishing a gap' model (Braun & Clarke, 2022, p. 120). In this way I have been able to provide a theoretically informed and richly contextualised examination of heteronormativity in primary school settings in the South Wales Valleys. I believe that this contextualised offering is of particular use when considering that HBTH bullying is still recorded in its highest levels in Wales when compared to the rest of the UK (Stonewall, 2017).

Although there may not have been a 'gap' as such that my research sought to fill, my analysis, through a psychological lens, offered unique connections to theory and research which informed implications for practice. Throughout my analysis I made links to Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994) as a means of making sense of the themes that developed. I believe that this is a helpful lens which enables the reader to visualise the various levels at which work needs to take place in order to begin to dismantle heteronormativity and foster inclusive environments for pupils.

I consider the contextualised nature of the analysis as a useful insight, not only for professionals working within the same contexts, but for any professionals hoping to dismantle heteronormativity. This finding highlights the importance of being aware of the community influence that plays a role in constructing how heteronormativity is able to influence, to greater or lesser, degrees in institutions like schools. Having this community awareness is imperative when knowing where to pitch systemic changes; for example, making all toilets gender free in community spaces may be met with

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hostility and backlash in a community that is less far along in their journey to dismantling heteronormativity. Instead taking a more tentative approach and meeting people where they are would be more helpful in helping them make inclusive changes.

5.2 Contributions to future research

One factor that I found particularly difficult during the process of analysis was considering what data was relevant to my dataset. Two of my participants (one from each focus group) were lesbians, married to women. They spoke of their own personal experiences of being queer teachers and how heteronormativity effects them and their practice. As you can see from the research diary to the left, letting go of this as a theme was challenging for me. The influence of heteronormativity on queer teachers seemed important, but it was beyond the scope of this research to explore this further within this project. However, I hope that including it in my 'further research avenues' in my empirical study will be motivational for future research; I may even take up this invitation in my own future research.

Extract from research diary: Letting go of initial themes is hard! The impact on queer teachers seems to be really important but maybe not relevant to this piece of work? – scope for future work?

Considering that Bronfenbrenner's (bio)ecological systems theory was used during analysis here, it may be useful for further research to explore the influence of the 'macro system', as this was beyond the scope of this research project. It would be of interest to consider further how local and nation-wide policies, procedures and curricula act as barriers or facilitators to the disruption of heteronormativity in our schools.

Through the process of the literature review I came to know more about ethnographic research design styles. This was not something I was familiar with before embarking on this research project but believe it could some interesting insights here. In this way a researcher would immerse themselves within an education setting to document their

perceptions of the influence of heteronormativity on the children/staff in the setting. This would offer an interesting, complementary insight to this research project.

5.3 Relevance to EP practice

The relevance of heteronormativity to EP practice is outlined in the empirical study above, but in short, I believe it falls under our remit to support CYP with their well-being, learning and social and emotional development (AEP/WG, 2016). Some of the findings presented in the empirical study were similar to those presented in the wider research (e.g., Abbott et al., 2015; Drury et al., 2022; Johnson, 2022; Lyttleton-Smith, 2019; Sill, 2022), however, a potential strength of this current research was the in-depth exploration of the participants perceptions using a psychological lens which formed unique connections to (bio)ecological systems theory (Bronfenbrenner, 1979; 1986; Bronfenbrenner & Ceci, 1994). Taking this systemic lens is helpful when considering the role of the EP at the level of the individual, group, and wider systems to ensure a holistic approach is taken (Association of Educational Psychologists/Welsh Government, 2016).

Several suggestions are offered in section B to help tackle a key concern of participants who were afraid of getting "blamed for not doing enough, for doing too much". Both focus groups discussed this fear of being seen to get things wrong and being perceived as 'bigoted'. EPs are well placed to help alleviate some of these anxieties, and suggestions to support this involved the use of consultation and/or group consultation to problem solve alongside school staff, as well as training to upskill teachers on language which was a key source of anxiety.

When the ontological and epistemological positions are considered, it is not surprising that the dataset offered is deeply contextualised. It is not, nor was it intended to be, *generalisable*. Instead, I implore the readers to consider the *transferability* of the analysis to their own unique contexts (Braun & Clarke, 2022).

3.4 Dissemination

Dissemination of the results has been considered in order to maximise the benefit of the findings and implications (McCartan & Robson, 2016). Presentation can be one useful supplementary way of communicating findings (McCarten & Robson, 2016), and I have already presented my research journey so far with several peers on the DEdPsy training course at Cardiff University. I also aim to promote the key findings from my research during my professional career as an EP. I will do through the creation of a presentation to share my findings and implications with the EPS where I am currently on placement and will be working when I take up my first qualified EP post. I plan to share and discuss what I found with the schools with which I will be working closely; this may involve the development of a whole school/cluster training on how to begin disrupting heteronormativity in school environments and more towards the creation of truly inclusive schools. I am also keen to develop a guidance document to assist schools in disruption of heteronormativity by drawing on my findings.

As one of my findings illustrated that EPs may lack awareness in this area, I shared the belief that it may be pertinent for DEdPsy courses to include these issues to ensure trainee educational psychologists (TEPs) are competent to support in this area and thus are adhering to their ethical guidelines (BPS, 2021; HCPC, 2015). As such, I am also hopeful that I might share my findings with future trainees on the DEdPsy course in Cardiff University, potentially as part of their wider talks on diversity and inclusion. To add, in the future I will also seek to publish my research in an EP related journal to disseminate my findings to the wider EP and TEP population in order to increase EPs awareness of these topics.

3.5 Personal reflections on research and practice

The completion of this research project has been a steep learning curve. When initially choosing my research area, I was excited about conducting research in an area that was extremely interesting to me. However, I was not wholly prepared for the emotional impact this journey would have. From setbacks with my ethics proposal, to

surgery causing delays with my data collection; the journey has a times felt completely overwhelming. Despite this, I am proud of what I have achieved and believe that I have been able to develop my skills as a researcher, as well deepening my understanding of a topic that I'm sure will be relevant to my role as a qualified EP.

Managing my role as a researcher, alongside my other commitments on placements has been challenging. As part of my DEdPsy commitments, I have been on placement working as a TEP for local authorities in Wales, and in my third year of study was the link psychologist, responsible for 6 schools. Switching between these two very different roles was tricky and at times I felt like I was not being a good TEP, or a good researcher. During these times, access to supervision with my fieldwork supervisor, research supervisor and professional tutors was imperative for helping me to 'see the wood for the trees'.

> **Extract from research diary:**
> Reflection – it isn't the write up that takes the time. As long as you have taken the time to read, reflect and analyse beforehand, the write up takes care of itself. It feels like it's all coming together.

When I began this process, although excited, I was also completing daunted by what I needed to achieve. However, I now feel more informed and competent, not only in discussing this topic, but in the research process itself. I now feel able to make links between my ontological and epistemological decisions and feel confident in justifying the stances I took and how they impacted upon my analysis. Completing this process helped me to appreciate the groundwork that goes into conducting and writing up articles for research journals and the sheer amount of work that goes on before the write up can begin. As illustrated in the diary extract above, I was beginning to feel frustrated to that I had spent so much time working but did not have any words on paper for a long time. However, all this background work came to fruition, as once I started the write up, things quickly felt as though they were coming together. In fact, despite

> **Extract from research diary:**
> Reflection – I have so much to say + not enough words!!

feeling initially daunted by the enormity of this project, as you can see from the right diary extract, I soon felt as though I needed even more words to tell my story.

Finally, if given the opportunity in my role as a qualified EP, I feel that I would now be more informed in supporting schools with heteronormativity, and the related topics of sexuality and gender. I am excited about the prospect of developing training as a starting point and beginning to introduce these topics of discussion in team meetings with the EPS, within my group consultations with ALNCos, and hopefully beyond.

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Appendices

Appendix A – Articles excluded at full screening, with reasons

Author and Article title	Reason for excluding
1. Caldeborg & Öhman (2020) – 'Intergenerational touch in physical education in relation to heteronormativity: Female students' perspectives'	Excluded at full screening – took place in Sweden
2. Ryan (2016)- Kissing brides and loving hot vampires: children's construction and perpetuation of heteronormativity in elementary school classrooms	Excluded at full screening – took place in the USA
3. Ferrante & Oak (2020) – ''No sex please!' We have been labelled intellectually disabled'	Excluded at full screening – due to being related to adult learning
4. Gunn (2011) - Even if you say it three ways, it still doesn't mean it's true: the pervasiveness of heteronormativity in early childhood education.	Excluded at full screening – took place in New Zealand
5. Goldman & McCutchen (2012) - Teenagers' web questions compared with a sexuality curriculum: an exploration	Excluded at full screening – although some participants were from the UK, results are only discussed with regard to the Australian curriculum/schooling.
6. Phillips & Larson (2012) - Preservice teachers respond to And Tango Makes three: deconstructing disciplinary power and the heteronormative in teacher education	Excluded at full screening – higher education/ took place in the US
7. Cush & Robinson (2014) - Developments in religious studies: towards a dialogue with religious education	Excluded at full screening – related to teacher education; higher education
8. Allen & Carmody (2012) - "Pleasure has no passport": re-visiting the potential of pleasure in sexuality education	Excluded at full screening – took place in Australasia
9. Koschoreck (2011) - Exploring online identity representation: a response to "heteronarrative analysis"	Excluded at full screening – took place in the USA
10. McGinn, Stone, Ingham and Bengry-Howell (2016) - Parental interpretation of "childhood innocence": Implications for early sexuality education	Excluded at full screening – related to parents' education of children, not schooling
11. Moore & Prescott (2013) - Absent but present: a critical analysis of the	Excluded at full screening – not related to education (youth work)

representation of sexuality in recent youth policy in the UK	
12. Batsleer - Dangerous spaces, dangerous memories, dangerous emotions: informal education and heteronormativity – a Manchester UK youth work vignette	Excluded at full screening – not related to education (youth work)
13. Slater, Jones & Procter (2019) - Troubling school toilets: resisting discourse of 'development' through a critical disability studies and critical psychology lens	Excluded at full screening – not relevant to topic matter
14. Rasmmussen (2011) - No outsiders and "The Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Child"	Excluded a full screening – book review. Not peer reviewed article
15. Nixon (2010) - Discrimination, performance and recuperation: how teachers and pupils challenge and recover discourses of sexualities in schools	Excluded at full screening – related to teacher education/further education
16. Robinson (2013) - Building respectful relationship early: educating children on gender variance and sexual diversity. A response to Damien Riggs	Excluded at full screening – took place in Australia
17. Weems (2010) - From "Home" to "Camp": theorizing the space of safety	Excluded at full screening – took place in the USA
18. Osgood and Mohandas (2020) - Reconfiguring the 'Male Montessorian': the mattering of gender through pink towering practices	Excluded at full screening – related to staffs' expreiences, not pupils
19. McCormack (2011) - Mapping the terrain of homosexually-themed language	Excluded at full screening – not related to schooling/education
20. Hunter, Butler and Cooper (2021) - Gender minority stress in trans and gender diverse adolescents and young people	Excluded at full screening – not related to schooling/education
21. Lucey, Olsvold and Aarseth (2016) - Working class fathers and daughters: thinking about desire, identification, gender and education	Excluded at full screening – not related to schooling/education
22. Turner-Moore, Milnes and Gough (2022) - Bullying in five European countries: evidence for bringing gender phenomena under the umbrella of 'sexual bullying' in research and practice	Excluded after full screening – did not take part exclusively in the UK, could not untangle results from those form other countries

23. Matera et al (2021) - Put yourself in my wheelchair: perspective-taking can reduce prejudice toward people with disabilities and other stigmatized groups	Excluded at full screening – took place in Italy
24. Ringrose & Renold (2012) - Slut-shaming, girl power and 'sexualisation': thinking through the politics of the international SlutWalks with teen girls	Excluded at full screening – not related to schooling/education
25. Schaub - LGBT young people's lives: Challenging but improving	Excluded – unable to track down full article after requests sent to library etc.

Appendix B – Example of completed CASP form:

1. Critical appraisal skills programme CASP				
Paper: 'I wouldn't have ever known, if it wasn't for porn' – LGBT+ university students' experiences of sex and relationships education, a retrospective exploration (Sill, 2022).				
Appraisal questions:	Yes	Can't tell	No	Comments
1. Was there a clear statement of the aims of the research?	X			Focus groups were used to explore the retrospective accounts of undergraduate students' experiences of sex and relationships education and how this met their needs as a gender and/pt gender minority.
2. Is the qualitative methodology appropriate?	X			Two focus groups conducted with 18-21 year old LGBT+ undergrads.
3. Was the research design appropriate to address the aims of the research?	X			Yes, however it should be noted that recollection bias may be at play due to participants having to recall past experiences.
4. Was the recruitment strategy appropriate to the aims of the research?	X			Participants were sought via the university LGBT+ society social media pages.
5. Was the data collected in a way that address the research issue?	X			Two focus groups were used
6. Has the relationship between the researcher and participants been adequately considered?	X			The research highlights their own membership of the LGBT+ community and the impact this may have had in the research process
7. Have ethical issues been taken into consideration?	X			The author considered the pair own impact at all stages of the research process to ensure their evolvement was ethically sound. Ethical approval was granted by Sheffield Hallam university

				research ethics committee.
8. Was the data analysis sufficiently rigorous?	X			Thematic analysis was used to analysis the data collected using a voice recorder which was transcribed.
9. Is there a clear statement of findings?	X			
10. How valuable is the research?	Highlights the heteronormativity and cis normatively of the SRE curriculum within England and Wales which may not be meeting the needs who are not heterosexual or cisgender. This lack of representation may therefore cause LGBT+ students to seek out alternative forms of sex education (porn etc.).			

<div align="right">

School of Psychology,
Cardiff University,
70 Park Place,
Cardiff,
CF10 3AT

</div>

Headteacher
School Address

Date

Dear [*insert name of Head Teacher*],

My name is Kelly Russell, and I am a Trainee Educational Psychologist from Cardiff University, currently on placement within the [*insert name of placement LA*] Educational Psychology Service (EPS). I am writing to you as part of my doctoral thesis research, for which I am hoping to conduct a research project investigating heteronormativity in primary schools. I am writing to enquire as to whether it would be possible to carry out a focus group with a group of your teachers to discuss heteronormativity within primary school settings (this would include non-traditional gender roles, gender expressions and sexualities).

I am aiming to recruit a focus group of 3 to 8 teachers to take part in this research. The focus group should take no longer than 90 minutes and can be carried out in person, or via video call (dependent on COVID-19 restrictions). A consent form and information sheet will be provided prior to the focus group, which includes giving consent to being recorded, primarily for my personal use in analysing and interpreting the data.

It is important to note that all information discussed during the focus group will remain confidential and will not be passed on to anyone else. Care will be taken to ensure that data remains secure and confidential until I personally transcribe the interview. The transcription will be anonymised, and the recording will then be deleted, and thereafter no individual school/staff member will be identifiable. Participants will be reminded not to mention individual's names during the focus group, however if this does occur then names will be replaced with a pseudonym at the point of transcription.

The time and location of the focus group will be arranged to suit the schools needs in order to minimise disruption.

Many thanks in advance for your consideration of this project. Please do not hesitate to contact me using the details below if you require any further information.

Yours sincerely,

Kelly Russell

Contact details of researcher:

    Kelly Russell, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University. Email: russellk1@cardiff.ac.uk

You can alternatively contact my research supervisor, Dale Bartle:

    Dale Bartle, Programme Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University. Email: bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

Or:

Cardiff University Ethics Committee. Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff. CF10 3AT. Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk   Tel: 029 2087 0707

Information Sheet

Exploring Primary School Teachers' discourses on heteronormativity in classrooms in Wales

Introduction

This research will be conducted as part of my doctoral thesis which is a course requirement for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) course at Cardiff University. It is hoped that this research will help develop a greater understanding of primary school teachers' perspectives on heteronormativity within primary schools. Heteronormativity can be defined as the assumption of a binary sex (male/female), with the corresponding binary gender expression (masculine/feminine), and natural attraction to the opposite sex (heterosexuality). Heteronormativity therefore privileges those who conform to traditional gender roles and those who are heterosexual.

This research is being conducted by Kelly Russell (Trainee Educational Psychologist) and supervised by Dale Bartle (Research Supervisor).

What is the purpose of the study?

My study is looking to explore primary school teachers' perspectives on matters of heteronormativity within schools; this is currently something that is limited within this field of research. This will include discussion around gender expression and sexuality; including how, or if, these matters should be discussed with primary-aged pupils. This may be a sensitive subject for some; if you feel uncomfortable at any time you may leave the focus group.

Why have I been asked to participate?

You have been asked to participate as you have been working as a primary school teacher for longer than one year, the contribution of your views and experiences will therefore be extremely valuable in increasing the research base in this area of study.

What happens if I decide to participate?

You will take part in a focus group with your peers which should take no longer then 90 minutes. This may take place in person or virtually (via Microsoft Teams). I am interested in talking about heteronormativity within the primary school environment. This will involve discussion around sexuality and different gender experiences. The focus group will be audio recorded for the purpose of transcription.

What are the benefits or risks of taking part?

It is hoped that taking part in this research will give you an opportunity to reflect on these

issues and how they influence, or impact upon your practice. The information you share will also provide this field of research with valuable information into how heteronormativity may influence the development of children within primary schools.

I do not foresee any risks to yourself from participating in this research, however you can find contact details below if you have any questions before or after the focus group has taken place.

This project has been reviewed and ethically approved by the Cardiff University, School of Psychology Ethics committee.

What happens if I change my mind?

You can withdraw from the study at any time, up until the point of transcription. You can also decline to talk about any topic presented to the focus group. After the focus group has taken place, you can request for your data to be removed from the research up until the point of transcription, which will happen approximately two weeks after the focus group has taken place. After this point, your data will be anonymous and can no longer be traced to you and cannot, therefore be removed from the study. Please note that if you chose to withdraw your data, your direct input in the focus group will be removed (direct quotes); however, your input will likely have influenced the conversation between other focus group members, and this will remain in the transcript.

What will happen to my information?

If the focus group takes place in person, it will be recorded using a mobile phone device for the purpose of transcription. This device has facial recognition security and can only be accessed by the researcher. If the focus group takes place remotely, via Microsoft Teams, the recording function on the Microsoft Teams desktop app will be used to record the audio from the focus group. This laptop can only be accessed by the researcher. The recording will be stored securely on either the mobile phone, or laptop, until it has been transcribed (up to two weeks after the focus group has taken place), after which it will be deleted. Cardiff University can store the anonymous transcriptions indefinitely.

How do you protect my privacy?

All names and personal information will be removed from the transcription, and it will not be possible to identify an individual, or school, from the transcript. Additionally, no individuals will be identifiable in the final report.

How do I find out about the results?

This research is being conducted as part of my doctoral thesis for the Doctorate in Educational Psychology (DEdPsy) course at Cardiff University. Once completed, the thesis will be available to read via Cardiff University Orca (an online library available to access via Cardiff University). A brief feedback summary sheet of the main findings will also be shared with your school when the project is complete.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact details of researcher:

Kelly Russell, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: russellk1@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of Research Supervisor:

Dale Bartle, Programme Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.

Email: bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of the Cardiff University Psychology Ethics Committee:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee, School of Psychology, Cardiff University, Tower Building, Park Place, Cardiff. CF10 3AT.

Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk   Tel: 029 2087 0707

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Privacy Notice:

The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and has a data protection officer (inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for processing this information is public interest. Information is being collected by Kelly Russell.

The information on the consent form that you will be provided will be held securely and separately from the research information. Only the researcher will have access to this form and it will be destroyed after 7 years.

The research information you provide will be used for the purposes of research only and will be stored securely. Only the researcher will have access to this information. After 4 months the data will be anonymised (any identifying elements removed) and this anonymous information may be kept indefinitely or published.

<u>Consent form</u>

Exploring Primary School Teachers' discourses on heteronormativity in classrooms in Wales

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understood the information sheet for the above study and have had the opportunity to ask questions and these have been answered satisfactorily.	
I understand that my participation is voluntary, and I am free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason.	
I understand that the researcher would like to conduct a focus group which should last approximately 90 minutes and will be recorded. I understand that I don't need to answer all the questions.	
I understand that the information I provide will be held confidentially by the researcher using a secure device until the interview is transcribed, at which point it will be anonymous.	
I understand that the data from the focus group will be transcribed within two weeks. I understand that I can ask for the information I have provided to be deleted/destroyed up until the time the data has been transcribed and anonymised. I understand that after this time, the information will no longer be identifiable to myself, and it will not be possible to withdraw.	
I understand that the personal data will be processed in accordance with General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR).	

Name of participant (print)   Date   Signature

THANK YOU FOR PARTICIPATING IN MY RESEARCH

Contact details of researcher:

Kelly Russell, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
Email: russellk1@cardiff.ac.uk

Contact details of Research Supervisor:

Dale Bartle, Programme Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
Email: bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

Appendix G – Interview schedule

This is an interview guide and does not, therefore have to be strictly adhered to.

Introduction

- Introduce myself more fully and explain why I am doing the research.

I am interested in talking today about heteronormativity, and when I say talking, I am interested in what you have to say. I will be offering a definition of heteronormativity in a moment but before I wanted to check some of the formalities. I am hoping that you have had a chance to read the information sheet and consent form that was sent to you, and I would like to remind you that anything discussed will remain confidential up until the point that this focus group recording is transcribed, at which point all data will be made anonymous. Another note on confidentiality – it does not mean that you cannot talk about taking part in the FG, but please refrain from identifying individuals in any way or attributing specific comments/behaviours to individuals when you leave this group.
I am just interested in your thoughts and opinions today, nothing is right or wrong, I just want to hear what you have to say. I am hopeful that the questions I ask will elicit some conversation between you all, you are not being interviewed so please try and talk to each other, rather than just answering the question, I am simply here to guide the conversation.

- Inform the participants that they can take a break at any time should they wish, and they can withdraw from the study at any time, up to the point of transcription (up to 2 weeks post-focus group)
- Ask permission to record the focus group and make participants aware that I may make some notes.
- Give participants opportunity to ask any questions that they might have.

'Warm-up'

1. Can everyone introduce themselves, share what age group they teach and any other responsibilities they hold in the school.

Main body (will begin with sharing a visual with the definition of 'heteronormativity' – this will remain visible for the duration of the focus group for participants to refer to).

Prompts are listed in bold and italics

1. Can you talk about the definition you just heard?
   a. ***Do you think this term is relevant to your setting?***

2. Do you find that children tend to act out traditional gender roles during their time in school, for example in their role play (e.g., girls playing in the home corner, and boys engaging in sports and rougher play etc.)? Can you discuss this?

a. **What about in their free time (such as play or lunch?)**
   b. **Why do you think that might be?**

3. Can you discuss what might happen when children act out gender in a way that's different to what you might expect (e.g., a boy acting in an effeminate way)?
   a. **How might staff react?**
   b. **How might children react?**

4. Can you talk about what you would do if a pupil wanted to express their gender differently? (e.g., for example, if a girl let you know they now wanted to be known by a boy's name and only wear boy clothes.)
   a. **Do you have experience of this?**
   b. **Do you have a policy in place?**

5. Could you discuss how you might disrupt heteronormativity in school?
   a. **What ways could you do this?**

6. Can you talk about how comfortable and confident do you feel in talking about LGBTQ+ issues?
   a. **Do you feel you have knowledge of the appropriate language to use when addressing these issues?**
   b. **How would you feel if a pupil asked you about a family with two dads etc.?**
   c. **Do you think it is needed in the primary age range?**

7. Do you think the EP would be helpful in supporting you with the issues we have discussed today?
   a. **How would you like to be supported?**

Generic prompts:
How? Can you say a bit more? Can I push you a bit further? What was that like? What do you mean by…? What did that mean to you?

'Cool-off'

That's everything that I had to talk about today, is there anything anyone would like to say or any things you'd like to follow up on that I haven't asked you? Do you have any questions?
What has it been like to participate in this focus group? Was it what you expected?

Closure

Thank you so much for allowing me to talk to you about this today, if you have any further questions or queries, please don't hesitate to contact me or my research supervisor, both of our details can be found on the debriefing form which will be emailed to you shortly.

Debrief Form

Exploring Primary School Teachers' discourses on heteronormativity in classrooms in Wales

Thank you for participating in this research project. The aim of this study was to explore your experiences and opinions on heteronormativity and heteronormative ideals and how they present themselves in primary classrooms.

As this is an exploratory study, I have no specific hypotheses and I aim to interpret the data obtained during the focus group using Reflexive Thematic Analysis. This will allow me to analysis the language used by the focus group when discussing topics of heteronormativity, including gender expression and sexuality. It is hoped that analysis will highlight themes from the discussion, including teachers' perceptions on how, or if, these matters should be discussed with primary-aged children.

Before participating in this research, you were provided with an information sheet and were asked to provide signed informed consent. This included giving consent to being recorded, for the researcher's use as an aid for analysing and interpreting the data. All the responses given by yourself will be held confidentially on a secure device until the focus group has been transcribed. Once transcribed, the information will be anonymous, and no individual will be identifiable in the results. All data will be kept securely at Cardiff University.

Please note that you can withdraw at any time up until the focus group has been transcribed, which will be up to 2 weeks after the focus group, and after this time your information will not be identifiable and therefore cannot be destroyed. Please note that if you chose to withdraw your data, your direct input in the focus group will be removed (direct quotes); however, your input will likely have influenced the conversation between other focus group members, and this will remain in the transcript.

This research is to be used as a course requirement on the DEdPsy course at Cardiff University. The results will be submitted to the university.

Please contact myself, my supervisor or the Cardiff University Psychology Ethics Committee, if you have any concerns or questions about the research you have been a part of.

Thank you very much for your participation.

Who can I contact for further information?

Contact details of researcher:
    Kelly Russell, Postgraduate, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
    Email: russellk1@cardiff.ac.uk
Contact details of Research Supervisor:
    Dale Bartle, Programme Director and Professional Tutor, Doctorate in Educational Psychology, School of Psychology, Cardiff University.
    Email: bartled@cardiff.ac.uk

If you would like to make a complaint about the study, further contact details can be found here:

Secretary of the Ethics Committee
School of Psychology, Cardiff University
Tower Building, Park Place
Cardiff, CF10 3AT Tel: 029 2087 0707. Email: psychethics@cardiff.ac.uk

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https://intranet.cardiff.ac.uk/staff/supporting-your-work/manage-use-and-protect-data/data-protection

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The information provided will be held in compliance with GDPR regulations. Cardiff University is the data controller and Matt Cooper is the data protection officer (inforequest@cardiff.ac.uk). The lawful basis for processing this information is consent. This information is being collected by Kelly Russell.

The information on the consent form that you will be provided will be held securely and separately from the research information. Only the researchers will have access to this form and it will be destroyed after 7 years. The research information you provide will be used for the purposes of research only and will be stored securely. Only the researcher will have access to this information. After the interview is transcribed, the data will be anonymised (any identifying elements removed) and this anonymous information may be kept indefinitely or published.

Appendix I – Ethical considerations

Ethical consideration	How addressed
Participant consent	Following gatekeeper approval, prospective participants were provided with an information sheet and consent form via email (appendices E and F). Participants were asked to return their written consent before their participation in the focus group. Participants were reminded of their rights at the beginning of the focus group, before recording commenced.
Confidentiality, anonymity and data protection	Due to the nature of focus groups confidentiality cannot be guaranteed. This was highlighted to participants at the start of the focus groups, and they were reminded of the importance of remaining confidential in their discussions and not to discuss the contents of the focus group discussions, outside of the focus group. Data remained confidential until the point of transcription when all identifying information was anonymised.
Right to withdraw	At the beginning of the focus group, participants were reminded of their right to withdraw, this was also highlighted in both the participant information sheet and consent form (appendices E and F). Participants were also reminded at the start of the focus groups that should they wish to withdraw, their direct quotes could be removed from the transcript, but their input would have influenced the conversation in the focus group, and this would remain in the transcript.
Interview recordings	Audio recordings were made during the focus groups using the researcher's mobile phone. This device has facial recognition security and can only be accessed by the researcher. The recordings were stored securely on this device up until the point of transcription, when the recording was deleted. This information was shared with participants in the information sheet (appendix E) and participants were reminded of this at the start of the focus group.
Debriefing participants	Participants were debriefed by the researcher at the end of the focus group and were provided with a debriefing form (appendix H). this form contained the contact details of the researcher, and the research supervisor should the participants with to gain any further information, withdraw from the study, or contact the researcher directly.

Appendix J – Use of Yardley's (2000; 2015) criteria to evaluate the validity of qualitative research:

Core principles and criteria for validity of research (Yardley, 2000; 2015)	How this study meets the criteria
1. Sensitivity to context	• An extensive literature review was conducted in Section A of this thesis to explore the historical and cultural background of heteronormativity and its presence in school settings. It also explored relevant literature related to the disruption of heteronormativity and barriers that may exist to prevent teachers from doing this. The remit of this literature review was fully outlined to the reader in Section A. • Informed consent was gained by all participants prior to them partaking in the focus group. They were also given the opportunity to ask any questions to the researcher directly before the focus group took place. • A debrief from was provided to all participants following the focus group. This contained information about accessing further information and withdrawing their data from the study. • A research proposal was completed, and ethical approval was granted by the Cardiff University, School of Psychology, Ethics Committee. • The relevance to practice to educational professionals, such as educational psychologists, and teachers are discussed.
2. Commitment and rigour	• The researcher conducted two semi-structured focus groups. • An interview schedule was generated and developed through discussion with my research supervisor (appendix G). This was used to guide the facilitation of the focus groups and the researcher chose when to probe further to gain further detail or clarification. • A research diary was kept (see Section C of thesis, and appendix M) in which the researcher reflected on the research process and regular research supervision took place throughout the research process. • Reflexive thematic analysis was used to analysis the data using guidelines set forth by Braun and

	Clake (2022). This process is outlined in Sections B and C.
3. Coherence and transparency	• Each step of the research process, from the inception to the end of the report has been outlined in detail in Section B (parts 2 and 3), Section C, and throughout the appendices. • The researcher reflected upon her own positioning (as seen in Section C, part 2.2) and how this would have impacted upon the research. • An example of coding and initial noticings made during the transcription process is offered in appendix K, for transparency. • Thematic maps are offered is offered in Section B, part 3.1.
4. Impact and importance	• The researcher has considered the importance of this research and the implications for educational psychologists and wider educational professionals; these are discussed in Section B, part 4; alongside acknowledgements of the limitations of the research in Section B, part 5. • The impact of the focus groups themselves acting as an intervention is explored in Section C, part 2.6. • The analysis that developed in Section B is deeply contextualised, the researcher therefore implores the reader to consider the transferability to their own settings. This is reflected upon in Section B, part 5 and Section C, part 3.4. • Dissemination of the findings and the impact on my own personal practice is explored in Section C, part 3.4.

Appendix K – Examples of Coding and Initial Noticings

P3:

Purposefully?

P2:

Probably, because I am aware that there are parents who could be, could have adverse feelings towards that and could make things more difficult. Because that's realistic, even though you wouldn't necessarily expect it to be realistic, it is, especially in the valleys. It's not, it is in some ways, there are some people who are still very….you know, aghast to having a teacher who might be married to a woman. But, but I that doesn't particularly offend me.

Russell, Kelly
Different culture in the valleys
Fear of parental backlash
Queer teachers can't be as open
Parents in the valleys are more like to be against queer staff
Its harder for queer teachers in the valleys

Group:

No

P4:

My friend's daughter's school a few years ago, two of the teachers got married. Erm, two female teachers got married and there was a big who ha about it, not, not negative, but just like, like a celebration, it was in the newspaper, not the newspaper sorry, the newsletter, people were giving them presents and stuff. And it was really lovely, you know, it was just as you would with any two teachers who are getting married. And, and, because everybody knew them, they were well we can't not announce it, it was just a standard thing that you would do. And it was it was really nice. So, they became I think, similar to DC, both of their surnames came together.

Russell, Kelly
Progress is being made
Schools are more accepting

3

P4:

Yeh, they're all in it. And even when it was a home corner, they're all in it,

Kelly Russell
All children play with all things
All children play in the home corner

P1:

yeah.

P4

And you know, home corner is one of your areas in year one, and everyone goes in it and plays in it, quite equally, there's nothing quite quite, I couldn't tell you necessarily, we watch them a bit, what roles they take when they go into it.

Kelly Russell
Younger children are more inclusive in their play
Younger children don't take up gendered roles in the classroom.
All children play together
Home corner is for everyone

P2

I do think it's quite varied. What, what I would say though, is I've got construction and small world together, sort of small construction, and then roleplay. And they have that as an area. And they can choose either way. And I would definitely say girls are more inclined to be in the roleplay section and the boys are more inclined to be in the small world construction end. And, that's their choice. It's not because we're suggesting the boys go to one area, or the girls go to the other, I think just be have a more, perhaps many of them have a more natural desire to go to one area than the other.

Kelly Russell
Boys naturally go to constructions
Girls naturally go to role play
Children play out gendered roles
Its children's choice

Kelly Russell
Children naturally like gendered toys.
Staff do not influence children's play
Boys have a natural desire for construction
Girls have a natural desire for role play

9

Appendix L – Generating Initial Themes

Age matters.

A topic for older children/...

Need outside agency support.

Children innocence.

Community influence.

Social media influence.

Children change fast.

It was better before.

progress.

Right language has progressed.

LGBTQ+ resources are used

Children as acceptance

Child based factors

Queer kids suffer emotionally

Mixed gendered groupings

Children act out gender

EP to support discussions with the family
EP as a hand to hold
EP as the expert who knows what to do
EP to bring home and school together
EP offers different perspectives
EP gives different perspectives
Context of the catchment area
EP sees different schools
EP can share best practice
EP gives proportionality
EP allows us to see beyond our school
EP to act as a sounding board
EP to signpost staff to support
EP to offer staff reassurance
EP to act as a sounding board
Reassurance needed from the EP
EP to hold their hand
EP as back up for tricky conversations
EP to give advice to parent
EP to give staff training

Child protection
Children are too young to make decisions about gen...
Teachers and parents force decisions on children wh...
Age-appropriate teaching
Child protection
Children protection
Children are too young t...

Younger children are too young to notice differences in sexuality
Heteronormativity doesn't exist for younger children
Young children are blank slates
Younger children have no biases or assumptions
Innocence of young children
Younger children are more inclusive in their play
Younger children don't take up gendered roles in the classroom.

The children are accepting
Children don't see any issues
Children are accepting
Children are accepting of [gender] chang...
All children are rough and tumble
All children play together
All children play in the home corner
All children play together
Home corner is for everyone
Children don't divide by gender in the classroom
All children play with all things
All child...
Children...

Children naturally take up gendered roles
Schools are heteronormative
Some children take up gendered roles, but some don't
The ratio of boys and girls changing your teaching approach?
Change our teaching for boys and girls
Boys are louder and more boisterous
Boys act out gendered roles
Boys are physical beings
Children act out gender on the yard
Children tend to take up traditional gender roles
Girls like role play
Boys like rough and tumble play
Children act out gender roles in their free play
Boys naturally go to construction
Girls naturally go to role play
Children play out gendered roles

Children are different in class to free time
Children are protected and can explore gender more in class
Children don't understand the insults they use on the yard
Classrooms encourage children to access all areas
Children encouraged to play with all toys
Its just being professional, its not to do with gender
As professionals we should encourage them to access all areas
Just need to tailor activities to children's interest...
We need to adapt activities to children's interest...

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Top-left sheet:
- Home-school communication
- Supportive conversations with parents and families
- Schools need to support families
- Parents look to schools for support
- Parents look to the school for advice
- School don't know what to do for the best
- Pressure on schools
- Its too much to expect of parents and teachers
- These issues are mostly unheard of

Valleys is different to other areas

Right-side sheet:
- The influence of social...
- The role of the media
- Media influencing children
- The media has a heavy influence
- The media puts these issues 'in your face'
- The media makes you question things more
- The media is forceful
- The media makes you see children differently
- The influence of media
- Influence of social media can be good and bad
- Children are more aware because of social media
- Children are exposed to more on TV and social...
- Role of media
- Role of TV
- Influence of media and games
- Influences of media
- Influence of celebrities

Blue sticky note: Home based factors

Left sheet:
- The influence of parents
- Children learn their beliefs and views from their parents
- Home influence
- Children adopt their parents views
- Children pick up views from their parents
- Children pick up outdated beliefs from home
- Home influence
- Old fashioned views from home
- Children repeat what they've heard at home
- Children are heavily influenced by their parents
- Home influence
- Children are expected to take on their parents beliefs at home
- Home has a large influence
- Children impacted by what they are exposed...
- Home can force their beliefs on children
- Home influence
- What children hear at home has an impact
- What toys children have at home influences how...

Yellow sticky note: Influence from the home.

Middle sheet:
- Difficult to deal with unhappy parents when it comes to gender issues
- Cant fight against parents beliefs
- Parental backlash
- Hard to have balanced discussions with parents
- Parents become very passionate about these issues
- Can't educate some parents
- Parents are rigid in their beliefs
- We have to respect parents' views
- Need to respect differences in religion...
- Everyone has different beliefs
- Respect

...for LGBTQ+ issues

Yellow sticky note: Parental backlash.

Lower-middle sheet:
- Parents have been scare...
- Society is changing at a rate...
- Parents are concerned
- Parents are worried about w...
- Parents are misinformed
- Parents push back against trans...
- Fear of parental backlash
- Parent push back
- Parental backlash
- Parental pressure
- Fear of backlash worries teachers

Green list:
- Parents push young children to be trans when...
- Parents pushing trans agenda
- Parents push trans agenda on to children
- Parents make a 'thing' out of things
- Parents forcing trans agenda on to kids
- Pushy parents

Yellow sticky note: Pushy parents / parents push their agendas.

Bottom-left sheet:
- Children are exposed to...
- School have to correct...
- Children need to be taught...
- Children re-enact what they...

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Appendix M – Diary extract showing initial theme map and links to (bio)ecological systems theory
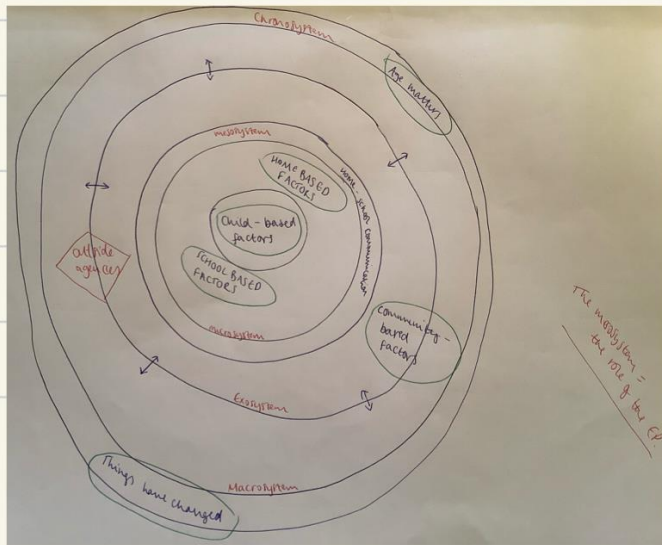

→ My initial theme map with code labels (29.12.22)

– links to Bronfenbrenner appear to be forming?

Child-based factors – the individual:
1. *Children as naturally gendered beings:*

The theme 'children act out gender' explores the core beliefs that children have a natural desire to explore toys or activities that are *for* their gender. This included the idea that boys are naturally louder and more boisterous, and naturally drawn to toys related to construction, and playing physical games on the yard. It also included exploration of the idea that girls are naturally drawn to the role play and home corner areas of the classroom. The reason the phrase 'naturally drawn to' is used here is to highlight that this acting out of gender was mostly discussed in relation to free play times, such as break or lunch time, with structured classroom activities being described as gender free. It also explores that anything outsides of this 'natural' order may be highlighted by peers, resulting in the emotional struggles of queer children and young people.

2. *Children don't see gender or sexuality/ children as naturally ungendered/asexual beings*

The theme 'children don't see gender or sexuality' explores the core idea that children are blank slates who do not have any expectations or assumptions related to their peers' gender of sexuality. It discusses the idea that children are wholly accepting of differences. This theme explores the idea expressed by the focus groups that all children play with all toys, and do not see the gendered connotations attached to particular activities, such as sports, or role play. Here, participants described children as naturally asexual and ungendered beings who could be and play with whatever they wanted.

The influence of the home – Microsystem:

The theme 'the influence of the home' explore the core idea that children's home lives, and the ideals of their parents have a monumental influence on their lives and core beliefs. One aspect of this idea was that teachers felt they had limited control over their influence on children if the views of the parents were in opposition with the stance of the school. This idea was often centralised around discussions of the trans children/young people and the new relationships and sexuality education (RSE) curriculum for Wales, that staff were fearful of/had experienced parental backlash and negative feeling. Participants expressed a fear that with parents and staff working in opposition to one another, their may be negative mental health impacts for the children/young people caught in the crossfire. Alongside this idea was that of the 'pushy parent' who goes too far in the other direction and may be forcing a trans agenda onto a child who is 'too young' or may 'grow out of it'.

School based factors – Microsystem:
1. *We already do enough/its not a problem here:*

The theme 'it's not a problem here' explores participants' perception that disrupting heteronormativity was something that needed to be done elsewhere. One key aspect of this discussion was around these topics being something that secondary schools needed to deal with, not the primary sector. Discussion around the nurturing nature of their own settings was present in both focus groups, with both feeling that the nurturing nature of their schools fostered an enhanced sense of belonging for their pupils. Central to this theme was the idea that school is already a safe place for young people, where they are free to explore their gender and sexuality in whatever way they choose. Participants felt that children and

young people would feel most comfortable to come out in the school environment and that they would be welcoming and accepting of any diversity they were presented with. The core beliefs held as part of this theme also included the idea that participants were already progressive in their thinking, the activities they presented and the language they used. They positioned themselves as progressive, willing, and supportive in all aspects related to discussions held during the focus groups.

2. **Teachers can't do this alone/too much is expected of teachers:**

In contradiction to the subtheme 'it's not a problem here', is the subtheme 'we can't do this alone'. Central to this theme was the feeling of fear among participants who felt the heavy burden of having to be the perfect role models for their children. One aspect of this was an anxiety around not knowing the correct language to discuss LGBTQ+ topics and a pressure to ensure that they were always getting things right. Central to this feeling was a lack of perceived effective training on these topics, result in a fear of doing too much, or not doing enough for their pupils. A second key aspect of this theme was the idea that this was just all too much for teachers to have to deal with without the support of outside parties. Participants discussed having to rely on personal experiences, friends/family members, and outside agencies, in order to feel comfortable discussing LGBTQ+ topics. Central to this aspect was the idea of needing a hand to hold and reassure them that they were doing the right thing, when faced with blame and difficult/sensitive conversations with parents.

The context of the valleys/ its different 'round here - Exosystem:

The theme 'its different 'round here' refers to the context of the South Wales Valleys, the location in which both focus groups took place, and the influence that this was perceived to have on the topic at hand. This theme encapsulates the core idea that this context is 'behind' over more affluent areas in their journey towards dismantling heteronormativity in their schools and their communities. A key aspect of this theme was that staff felt it was part of their role to open the eyes of the children to the world beyond their local towns. Staff shared that they felt there were less LGBTQ+ people in their local communities, leading to an expectation among families of a nuclear family set up. Another key aspect of this theme was the idea that community has a large impact on children, particularly older children who may play, in a more unsupervised capacity, in the community and then repeat homophobic language that they have heard there. This influence was repeated multiple times by both groups, perhaps reflecting a helplessness staff feel in attempting to combat these issues under the influence of the wider community.

The role of the EP – Mesosystem:

This theme refers to the communication between factors within the microsystem, and perhaps even the exosystem. This includes home-school communication and communication between schools in the local area. A key concept of this theme was that schools cannot tackle these things alone and need the support of outside agencies, such as educational psychologists, to support them in their home-school communication surrounding these issues, such as managing challenging conversations. A second key aspect of this theme was the EP role in support staff to see beyond the context of their school and give a wider, more balanced perspective of what is going on in other schools and in the wider community and how this might be supportive.

Things change over time – Chronosystem:

The theme 'things change over time' explores the core idea that the passing of time has an influence on people's ability to disrupt heteronormative ideals. The first key concept of this theme is the idea of progress and how staff have made many positive changes to their teaching in recent years to help dismantle some of the heteronormativity which may have previously been common practice. This included progression in the language they use, such as no longer using the terms 'boys' and 'girls' to divide pupils. The second main expression of 'things change over time' was that of childhood innocence, and that the influence of heteronormativity was a topic of older children, in upper KS2, or secondary school. This was confounded by the idea that children change quickly and they are going through a lot of bodily changes throughout childhood, there was therefore a reluctance to support younger children in explore gender differences, for a fear that they may quickly change their minds.

Appendix O – Corresponding quotations for developing themes

Child-based factors: the individual level		
Children as naturally gendered beings	FG1, P1, page 2	"But, I think some of our children do just naturally go to those roles. So, we do find boys happily go to the construction the girls heavily go…"
	FG1, P2, Pg14	I think it's also interesting in our classes, the balance of boys and girls as well, and how about alters like our teaching sometimes.
	FG2, P3, Pg8	it does, it does depend. I think if, generally, as a rule, the boys are more physical.
	FG2, P3, Pg 8	And the girls are more, ummm, …. I suppose, if you when you're on duty, if you're watching the children, the girls are often role playing, aren't they, in their play, is what they do. They're playing this, we're playing…they were playing discos or something today, they were playing other there, and they had to come over and show me their dances. But the boys are like grabbing each other, wrestling
	FG2, P2, pg 9	What, what I would say though, is I've got construction and small world together, sort of small construction, and then roleplay. And they have that as an area. And they can choose either way. And I would definitely say girls are more inclined to be in the roleplay section and the boys are more inclined to be in the small world construction end. And, that's their choice.
	FG2, P2, Pg13	The girls are perhaps more tolerant *group laughter*
Children as naturally ungendered/asexual	FG1, P3, pg 5	I will be honest, like the girls are just as much amongst it, they like being rough and ready and hands on. And I think that's to be said, like they, they celebrate that, you know, and I feel like it's very much a free for all…

And we will notice, like, the boys will happily go and use the teddy bears, and maybe do a roleplay or the puppets, and they might snuggle up with a book and things like that. So, it's not, it's not in my class, I wouldn't say it's always necessarily based on what the gender expectation is for them. |
| | FG1, P4, pg2 | we went on a school trip and it was quite funny, part of their school trip they had balls, like a football pitch inside, and the boys were in there. It was all boys part from one girl from the class. The |

		boys were in there with blonde wigs and crowns on playing, because it was role play and dress up. And they didn't care, they were playing football and things
	FG2, P4, pg 3	When they're younger, it's, everything is normal. You know, they don't, don't think anything? Not that it isn't normal, but you know what I mean? Is that kind of like, there's no heteronormativity to it, for the younger kids
	FG2, P4, pg8	And I think, you know, there's the group that plays that running, the kind of running into the wall, playing their kind of catch me games type of thing. And they're all a bit rough and tumble.
	FG2, P4, pg 9	And you know, home corner is one of your areas in year one, and everyone goes in it and plays in it, quite equally, there's nothing quite quite, I couldn't tell you necessarily, we watch them a bit, what roles they take when they go into it.
	FG2, P3, pg12	But you know, they just get on with it, the children, you know, I think they're, they're just sort accepting of who the person is, I suppose.
The influence of the home: the microsystem		
FG 1, P3, pg 7	For example, I had a little boy, in my class a couple of years ago, he said, oh miss miss, you know, I'm gay, and I was like, oh, that's exciting, you know, that's great, you know, celebrate it and we had a little chat and he said yeah, but my dad said it's a really bad thing because you know, because I like to dance different to him and he says I gotta dance different you know, and try to correct in that way you know	
FG1, P1, pg 8	I think you're getting is already getting a bit of a kickback from the RSE curriculum. And you can see some parents don't feel comfortable and are worried. I think that's the main thing is worrying thing of what they think we're going to teach them. In, in those subjects. The mere fact, I don't think they realise it will be done in a progressive way.	
FG1, P6, pg8	I had one parent come in, when they said that we were going to be teaching RSE and said, 'You're not gunna to teach my child, it's okay to be a boy, are you?'	
FG1, P6, pg 8	So I, you know, I think it's that perception of, I think the scare mongering of the RSE isn't there, lots of parents have been scare mongered.	
FG1, P1, pg9	I think the one that stands out to me not so much, this was years ago, it was a little girl. And I think she very much wanted to be a boy, she kept saying, 'I want to be a boy'. And you could see the mother very much fighting against it. And you could see this child suffered then with her mental health, and she was a very nervous	

	child, and maybe if she had been supported a bit more. And I think as a school, we tried to without saying things just like its okay, what feelings you have. But then at home, there was a very strong backlash of 'you are a girl, I'm telling you, you're a girl'.
FG1, P4, pg 9	I was the class teacher for two years. And, it was a little girl wasn't it. And it was what I was saying in the beginning about, you know, she wanted to go into construction or whatever. But I felt it was more of a push from her mum.
FG1, P2, pg11	I think that parents support enabled that child to access, like counselling, through mermaids and things like that.
FG1, P4, pg15	So, if someone is telling us, right, this is the correct terminology to use, but then you've got parents saying I don't want my child knowing that word. This is coming up with the PSE stuff. So, it's very difficult isn't it
FG2, p4, pg 5	And that's what a lot, not a lot of parents, one of the set of parents was, was kind of talking about this kind of, probably, you're going to make sure they know that there is a male and a female and all this kind of stuff. And it was well it's not really just about that, you know, there's a lot that we need to look at what's the different aspects of this. Erm…and that is something that people need to understand. Our job is to educate not to isolate or judge, or if you just need to know everything, like anything to do with religion, anything to do with numeracy and to do anything, you know, you have to educate them on all aspects of it. And that is just what our job is, is to educate. We can't make judgments, we're unbiased in that respect, you know.
FG2, P2, pg 5	But I think people like myself, who, who are in a relationship, somebody with the same gender, the backlash from the RSE has really put us as a, as a group, give gets given us a feeling again, of feeling concerned about being open and honest, because you have this backlash from parents about sexuality, transgender, all those things. And whilst I think a lot more of it is to do with transgender people and gender identity, there is a huge group still protesting on the streets saying you can't teach my children to about being gay, whereas, and that obviously impacts on my esteem, you know, my identity, it is, it's not very nice.
FG 2, P3, pg 10	But also, there must be some outside influences on that as well in terms of the types of toys and opportunities they've been presented with at home.
FG2, P3, pg 21	And interestingly, when we've done that, in the past that I know when year six have done the show before and there was a boy played the mum in a particular sketch. That parent wrote to me and was furious.
FG 2, P4, pg21	Because you're fighting against… somebodies' beliefs, isn't it? So, it's not. It's not just like, I'm having a conversation and trying to educate you on this. You're really like, some people are so 'this is no, this is absolutely how I feel, it's my choice, my child, my this,

		my that'. And it's really hard to kind of have that balanced discussion with somebody about it when they're that vehement over things.
FG2, P2, Pg22		And it is difficult, because at the end of the day, it is their child, and it is their choice, and it's their belief. So, we have to respect that as well. Especially with religious beliefs, we have to be really mindful of different people's beliefs and what they've been brought up to expect and experience.
FG2, P4, pg23		I think, yeah, the RSE meeting is probably the biggest thing that we had in terms of, not just sexuality, but more, you know, the transgender, the masculine and feminine thing and I, again, I spoke to people and researched and things like that, to be able to see confidently about certain aspects or it… the things that they were challenging.
FG1, P3, pg4		I just think it's more from family that I think a lot of children and families have just adopted wherever their parents have always thought, as opposed to it being traditional, I think is 'well my mum and dad have always thought it, so I think it' so its learnt, like a learned perception as opposed to an actual perception of their own, like a true understanding of it. Yeah.
The influence of the school: the microsystem		
Its not a problem here	FG1, P6, Pg 4	I think were probably different from other schools, I think we're probably better at kind of, you know, we've had a few trans kids, we've had a few kids say that they're gay, and we've just kind of reinforced that that's okay, and how can we help them? I think we are a bit more maybe we've got some, as a staff, I think we are a bit more open.
	FG1, P4, pg 5	I think maybe it's more acceptable in school, or the children see it as more acceptable
	FG1, P6, pg 6	I think that's probably like the staff being very clever to kind of test those gender norms and test those stereotypes. I think our staff are quite aware of it. And I think they, they are a bit more, which could be whatever you want to use, you can wear pink you can, I think, you know, staff don't never miss those opportunities, I think we are probably skilled staff, there that do challenge the norms, if that make sense.
	FG1, P3, pg6	But I also think, staff see beyond that, you know, the gender to the children, obviously its important, but we're looking at them as who they are as individuals, it doesn't matter. So you know, we celebrate what they want to do for what they want to do.

	FG1, P4, pg11	And they are very, you know, within the class, the school, the Federation, they are very accepting of change and differences.
	FG1, P2, pg 11	I think it's that feeling of belonging as well, within our federation, that is very much we were family was so it's it doesn't matter, you know, who you are, what you wear anything where you're part of our family. So yeah, I think that plays into it with us.
	FG1, P4, pg13	it comes down to belonging and that as a federation, we are very accepting and that it's okay to be different or you know, I think that comes right from nursery, you can see that when you're in year one, year two, three, and it comes from the school, doesn't it?
	FG1, P3, pg18	I think one thing we've got to like celebrate about us as a federation, which I duno if its always good, but we are quite a young staff as well, and I think like we are quite accepting, but in the know of what's going on in the media and things. In schools where, you know, the teachers have been around for a while, who are not quite used to change, they might not know what those terminologies are.
	FG2, P2, pg10	And that must show that we're doing something right. If boys and girls both feel they can be going to those clubs
	FG2, P4, pg11	But I definitely there is an acceptance in this school, where you do what you want to do. You know, there's no, there's no judgement for what, it's not like he's doing a boy's thing, or she's doing a girl's thing really? It doesn't really come up.
	FG 2, P2, pg14	The nice thing is that she felt that she could express her, her wants or desires and felt safe to do so really, isn't it? And, you know, the school responded, and the family responded as we would hope they would.
	FG 2, Pg19	P1 But they're all really in mixed groupings P2 They're not in gender, we don't gender group do we
	FG1, P6, pg 4	but I think in general across, you know, schools, I don't think they may be as liberal as us.
We can't do this alone	FG1, P2, pg12	And we had an old governor as well, MW, who I think was quite good. She worked with *local authority* with equality and things didn't she, so, I think she's been a good contact point, hasn't she?

	FG1 P1, pg 15	And I think it's sometimes it's not being blind to, but I think sometimes you're afraid to offend. And we had a conversation earlier didn't we, we were like, well if, if you are a crossdresser, are you gay? Are you straight? It's, it's having those questions, that actually we, we don't know it. And I think we came across that when we went for the diversity didn't we?
	FG1, P3, Pg 15	like I said, you know, its making sure, because you want to get involved, and you want to encourage the children to be open and honest. But then you're also I know, sometimes you might get a bit worried what if I say the wrong thing, then it discourages them and then that's the memory that lasts with them, you know
	FG1, P3, pg16	But I think having that training to know what is OK and knowing that terminology. But not making it be a thing. Not making a thing of it but just making sure everybody is comfortable and everybody belongs but actually not be a thing like, I know it sounds bad, not making it a stick to beat people with, its not that, is making sure that everybody knows that they're being treated fairly, and everybody is accepted for whoever they are.
	FG1, P1, pg16	And I suppose higher up the school, I suppose it would be appropriate training for staff for where they would come in for it, exactly like the RSE. Sometimes you're left to things, and sometimes you're left as staff to unpick it which I don't think is fair for staff with everything else they're doing, there should be specific training and say look this is how you could approach it…
	FG1, P2, pg 19	And sometimes having that external person to discuss that individual case, I don't want to say we go with emotion, but sometimes its very easy if there's a lot of emotion in a situation to be sort of distracted or sway, but is coming in as independent with the knowledge of different places we can access
	FG2, P4, pg 4	And it's getting the books that are out there. It's knowing what books are out there to use and that are appropriate as well. So, it's a lot of kind of, you don't know sometimes what's available?
	FG 2, pg 14-15	P2 The staff did say that they found that difficult, didn't they, because when that was brought up in a meeting recently, in the RSE audit, a couple of

		members of staff, so they didn't know how to deal with that situation. And they didn't know how to, you know, they knew obviously, they did it, they haven't had prejudice or discrimination, but they weren't sure, the best thing to say, they didn't want to, I think what they said was…
		P1
		You don't want to get anything wrong. This is the trouble isn't it.
		P3
		Its the fear isn't it of being of being accused of being bigoted in some way when you don't and it's just a change in that and it's a social change as well in terms of pronouns and that type of thing as well…
		P4
		And remembering to say the changed name is a tricky thing as well. And I think you don't want to you don't get blamed for not doing enough, for doing too much for you know, you're in a kind of quagmire of what's the right thing to do and we don't have enough training on it.
FG2, P4, pg15	And it was just trying to get advice from, from or whatever you feel that you could kind of access it.
FG2, P4, pg23	I think, yeah, the RSE meeting is probably the biggest thing that we had in terms of, not just sexuality, but more, you know, the transgender, the masculine and feminine thing and I, again, I spoke to people and researched and things like that, to be able to see confidently about certain aspects or it… the things that they were challenging.
FG2, P2, pg26	And how can they, how can we expect teachers and parents really to know how to deal with a child that says they want to change genders. It's… for most people it's unheard of
Its different 'round here: the exosystem	
FG1, P3, page 3	"like there is the expectation of having that nuclear family set up of, you know, a male, female with your children sort of situation"
FG1, P3, pg7	when they're on the yard when they're left to their own devices, you know, you do hear unkind things, and children will use things but they have no idea in what context they're saying it. So, you know, it is things like that, we will notice they repeat stuff. But when you intervene then as a member of staff, and when you get

	to the nitty gritty, the children and don't understand what they're actually saying, they're just repeating what they've heard around in the community or in the media. And just think, oh, I'll just say that. So you know, and then sometimes the children are getting called things and again, they don't understand what they're getting called
FG1, P3, Pg12	you know, a lot of our children haven't gone beyond *local town*. So, you know, it's trying to open them to seeing all different types of people, you know
FG1, P4, pg17	Cos you know, its obviously a lot different to our catchment area
FG2, P2, pg 3	because I am aware that there are parents who could be, could have adverse feelings towards that and could make things more difficult. Because that's realistic, even though you wouldn't necessarily expect it to be realistic, it is, especially in the valleys.
FG1, P3, pg2	like the context of where we teach like, so for example, a couple of months ago, a few of us went to visit another school in *Local Authority*, which is more in a more affluent area, and they had non-gender specific toilets. So, it was really interesting discussion that we had there, wasn't it. And so that kind of started a conversation for us here.
FG1, P6, pg3	But I think in schools, there is a bit more of an assumption maybe that there's the kind of norm for it to be male, female, especially in this area
FG1, pg4	P6 I think our demographic is probably a little bit more, I don't know, P1 Heterosexual, I would say, yeah.
Seeing outside of the bubble: the mesosystem	
Fg1, P3, pg19	And I think, like you said, having that perspective as an EP, you know, having that, knowing from outside of just our area, and our school and our catchment, because you can get like you said, especially with us lot, we love our kids so you get caught up in what's the best for them and obviously you'd know from external, going through different schools, what…its like that proportionality of it all isn't it, what's going on here and where's the priority, is it just a phase, and you'd have a better, I imagine, you'd have more experience and knowing where you are within the stages of moving things along if they are looking to change.
FG1, P2, pg 19	And sometimes having that external person to discuss that individual case, I don't want to say we go with emotion, but sometimes its very easy if there's a lot of emotion in a situation to be sort of distracted or sway, but is coming in as independent with the knowledge of different places we can access

FG2, P4, pg17	I can't remember, I can't remember off the top of my head, what it was. It's just, it's just finding the right support out there, isn't it and everyone here is so willing to do the right thing and wants to support as best they can, that you do get in a bit of a sticky wicket over…which way to go, you know, and its dead stressful, its dead hard to kinda know the right thing, because you just want to do right by the kid and by the family.
FG2, P1, pg24	Yeh we just need signposting, and we just need that reassurance that were dealing with things in the right way
FG2, P1, pg24	Well, you [researcher] would have had a phone call in the summer term, last, *group laughter* last year definitely. It's just when we come across this that we haven't come across before
FG2, pg25	P3 I suppose it can be a contentious issue for some people, you always sort of have that level of doubt, that oh god are we doing the right thing P1 Are we doing the right thing now, is this the right way to deal with this, you know? It's just having that little bit of reassurance and backup really, just to know.
FG2, P4, pg25	I think parents, a lot of them don't know where to turn, and don't know who to talk to. You know, we've got a professional we can maybe contact, but a lot of parents maybe would, and its having that voice for them as well, to like, 'how do I handle this?', 'what do I say?', 'what do I do?', which is kind of what we did with that dad, and the conversations we had with him, he was asking, how do I do this and what do I do, and its just giving them, you know, giving them , the 'if you've got any questions we're here'.
FG2, P1, pg26	And this is why *name of mental health team*, and having these outreach workers see, in school, is absolutely really what everybody needs.
FG2, pg 26-27	P4 A fulltime outreach worker, in every cluster at least, yeh in the comp, that should then feed down to the primary. P1 Yeh there should be, somebody with real expertise and knowledge and experience of all these things because its new to us isn't it. If you're in mental health or wherever, and you, you've come across, you got the experience then and haven't you, and the confidence to deal with it. Whereas, like we've had one incident so far, haven't we, of somebody here and coming to us, and perhaps… it might be a long time before, we don't know do we, when you know that'll happen again, or would it be something different, it's difficult for us when you're not dealing with it all the time, you

		know, so *name of mental health team*, really, is what everybody needs… in an ideal world. Like a mental health outreach worker.
FG2, P4, pg28		It's just a whole approach then isn't it, its whole approach, instead of people forcing their own agendas maybe, you know, instead an approach, that's what we're trying to do with RSE isn't it, with the cluster, so we're all kind of working from the same kind of hymn sheet and saying the same kind of thing.
Things change over time: the chronosystem		
We've come a long way	FG 1, P1, pg 9	we've come on a lot, I would say, we're nowhere near there. But I would say now, children are more open, but it's where the family is also on the same wavelength
	FG1, P3, pg12	you know, like, in literacy, or things like that, or in topic, you know, it's not the nuclear family set up, of a mum and dad, it could be, you know, same sex parents in the picture, it could be just having reading books within the reading area, have, you know, gender, gender neutral or different experience, like different types of families, for everybody to see.
	FG 1, P3, pg 15	But generally speaking, I think, you know, we're on the right track. We're not there yet, but it's something we could look at further
	FG2, P2, pg 4	Yeh, I think we are moving more towards questioning that heteronormativity, in the sense that we look at books that are broader in their approach.
	FG2, P1, pg 6	I do think as well. You know, like years ago, you'd say, 'boys line up, girls line up', we wouldn't say that anymore and we haven't said that for a long, long time have we.
	FG2, pg 7	P4: Something, and its not necessarily to do that, but in terms of calling them your grownups rather than mum and dad. P2: Yeh, I never say mums and dads, I say your mums, dads, nans, bamps, or whoever this is picking you up today.
	FG2, P4, pg 10	And it's nice, nicer now, when you're hearing there's more going to more different types of clubs. Like when I ran the netball club it was both that came. When it was, you hear them going to rugby and football it's a mix of everybody going

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	FG2, P2, Pg10	And that must show that we're doing something right. If boys and girls both feel they can be going to those clubs
	FG2, P3, pg27	we did things like in the school prospectus, under school uniform, it used to be this is the boys uniform, this is the girls uniform, now we just say this is the uniform these are suggested things, and we don't sort of label it boys and girls, we just say bottoms, skirts, pinafores, trousers, shorts, you know we just put them as a one list we don't say this is for boys and this is for girls
	FG1, P3, pg 2	And just things like that are really more like where are things, where are things leading to now, I think there's been a big change and a big shift, since I started my teaching career.
What is the right age?	FG1, P4, pg6	what a child could be like in reception, year one, and what they play with compared to then, year 6, could be totally different It could just be a child and exploring and finding their way and themselves as an individual.
	FG1, P4, pg6	but what I don't agree with is I do think the media has got a lot to do with it is teachers, parents, or whoever homing in on something like that, as a three-year-old, and then pushing and going with it. If it's, you know, he's gonna be gay, he's playing with this or he wants to be a boy, look, look at her, you know what I mean?

| | FG1, pg10 | Participant 4:
And you know, being in year one, year 2, its very, you know, they're five, six and seven even then it's a very young age to be like, to start anything. So, I think they need to be at school and parents as you know, everyone's not the same, but be supported in their decisions. But then in four years' time, what happens if she just sort of grew out of it?

Participant 4:
I felt that mum made, or helped to, how do I say this properly?

Participant 1:
Almost facilitated?

Participant 4:
Facilitated something, that maybe necessarily I felt she was too young, that's my opinion. She might have been too young for, but that has, you know, she's still young. She's 11, 12?

Participant 2:
13 now

Participant 4:
13. To me 13 is still young, isn't it? Like these bodies are going through changes, milestones you're still hitting, like I say. So, like I said to be supportive? And then, like I said, I don't know what the right age is, *inaudible* I just felt year one, year two, was a very, to sort of home in on something and like...

Participant 5:
Make it a thing.

Participant 4:
Yeh, make a thing about it, whereas it might have not.

Participant 1:
Maybe they'll be a tom boy and then they'll grow up. |
| | FG2, P2, pg 2 | It's very different in high school to primary isn't it. Because that's when they, people tend to explore their sexuality. Whereas in primary school, we don't really discuss much to do with sexuality. Unless |

		they're in year five and six. Some debate occurs there; we don't do much before there.
	FG 2, P2, pg25	the dialogue has to change, particularly in secondary schools, not so much in primary, were so, there's usually such a strong sense of community and warmth, that I don't think it's such an issue and it's not an issue here. But in secondary school I think it's very different.
	FG2, P4, pg25	We would need a phone call yeah, I would say maybe in High School, you need input, do you know what I mean, I think they would need umm… and I think it would include parental input, erm you know parental meetings and advice and guidance for parents and things like that as well
	FG2, P4, pg28	That's, again, not so much primary schools, the change needs to be with comp.
	FG1, P4, pg8	At an appropriate age isn't it, as well