

**A QUALITATIVE STUDY OF PRIVATE CHRISTIAN SCHOOL ADMISSION
POLICIES REGARDING HOMOSEXUALITY AND TRANSGENDERISM**

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ABSTRACT

The US Supreme Court decision in Obergefell v. Hodges (2015) had far-reaching consequences for Christian businesses, organizations, and ministries. As the rapidly changing socio-political environment embraces LGBTQ concerns, private religious schools must prepare to address new types of admission decisions. The purpose of this qualitative, exploratory study was to determine whether private religious schools have codified policies in place that specifically address the admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. The results of a nationwide, online survey of 61 private religious schools as well as semi-structured interviews of five religious school administrators revealed that almost 73% of Christian schools do not have a policy in place to guide admission decisions regarding children from homosexual families or children with same-sex attractions or gender dysphoria. The interview results from this study provide insights that may help private, faith-based school administrators develop written admission policies that promote balance between litigation concerns and the desire to serve the public and to make compassionate admission decisions.

Keywords: Students with same-sex parents; homosexual students; transgender students; admission policies; Christian schools; private schools; LGBTQ in schools

Introduction

In the summer of 2017, a young mother applied to enroll her second-grade daughter at a private Christian school in southern New Mexico. The registrar called to schedule a family interview; at the end of the conversation, the mother casually noted that she was a same-sex parent and asked whether that fact would pose a problem for her child's admission. The registrar was unprepared to answer her question because the school did not have a policy to address this situation nor any of the questions related to the admission of homosexual or transgender students.

Despite the changing cultural landscape, most private schools have seemingly not kept pace with socio-political changes by updating admission policies to adequately reflect their philosophical precepts. Faith-based schools are under increasing societal pressure to accommodate their practices to the rapidly changing cultural standards of human sexuality (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Christian schools, desiring to be consistent with traditional biblical standards of morality and sexuality, find themselves in conflict with the legal recognition of same-sex marriages and the increased civil rights' protections and accommodations for gay and transgender students (Christian Legal Society, 2015). Private faith-based school administrators need to carefully examine the ways that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) admissions policies play a role in their schools' enrollment practices.

Theoretical Underpinnings of the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was gleaned from the work of Professor Adrianna Kezar (2001) at the University of Southern California. Her evolutionary change model of organizations was exclusively focused on change, needed change, and change resistance in institutions of higher learning. As with many colleges and universities, but unlike public

schools, private schools are tuition-dependent and highly influenced by competition, demographic shifts, and socio-political movements (Gage, 2017).

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

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

Review of Literature

A comprehensive review of literature revealed a distinct vacuum in scholarly research on private religious schools' admission policies related to children from same-sex homes and homosexual or transgender students. Popular literature, though more abundant, is primarily anecdotal and presents stories with editorial praise or condemnation for decisions made by school administrators or boards. Many publications, written to advise private religious schools, suggest ways for private school administrators to approach sexual orientation and gender identity

concerns in order to maximize legal protection. This brief review of literature focuses on three areas of the literature during the past 10 years: scholarly publications, popular literature, and affiliate literature and resources.

Academic Literature

The most pertinent literature to date was a study conducted by Coley (2012) for the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) and reported in an article entitled “Should Your Christian School Enroll the Child of a Same-Sex Couple?” (Coley, 2012). To answer the question, Coley (2012) surveyed a non-random sample of convenience ($n = 66$) of ACSI member schools’ administrators. Results of the survey indicated that 75% of Christian schools did not have a policy to address applications from same-sex families and 66% had never discussed the matter with their boards (Coley, 2012). While a majority (58%) of Coley’s (2012) respondents indicated they would deny admission to a child with homosexual parents, most did not have a policy stating the school’s position. Coley (2012) reported that the high percentage of schools without an admission policy to address the issue of homosexual families was “a major concern” (p. 32). When Coley (2012) analyzed the open-ended survey responses, he concluded that “leaders [are] taking positions at polar opposites of the continuum on the issue and holding these positions on the basis of their understanding of biblical principles” (Coley, 2012, p.33).

A specific concern expressed by administrators in the open-ended survey responses from the Coley study (2012) was that admission of children from same-sex families might be viewed as acceptance of their lifestyle. Other concerns included the involvement of same-sex parents in the school, whether a same-sex couple might have some kind of hidden agenda to do harm to the school, and whether acceptance of a student with homosexual parents would open the door to the open expression of a homosexual lifestyle by students (Coley, 2012).

Popular Literature

Private Christian schools have been the subject of a plethora of media reports in the United States regarding admission policies. The researcher conducted a review of popular literature from the past ten years to ascertain the breadth and focus of the challenges that private schools face related to admission policies. In general, the popular literature focused on ambiguities and lack of clarity in private schools' admission policies; challenges to the schools' rights to deny admission to private schools; and biblical perspectives on human sexuality and marriage as the foundation for making admission decisions and formalizing policies (e.g., Baird, 2013; Bohon, 2012; Garrison, 2015). A brief sampling of popular literature is included in the following paragraphs.

In 2010, the *National Catholic Register* reported on Catholic schools in Boston, Massachusetts and Boulder, Colorado that made national headlines by denying admission to students with same-sex parents (Desmond, 2010). At the time, same-sex marriage was legal in Massachusetts, but not in Colorado. The Catholic church authorizes local pastors to administer parish schools in accordance with the teachings and traditions of the Catholic faith. In this case, the superintendent of Catholic schools in Boston, over-ruling the school's priest, noted that the priest's decision to deny admission to a student with homosexual parents was a mistake and offered to place the child in question in a different parochial school (Desmond, 2010). In the Boulder case, James Flynn, Vice Chancellor of the Denver Archdiocese and a canon lawyer, noted that Catholic education is a partnership between the parents and the school and "if the two aren't aligned on human sexuality, human dignity or doctrinal teachings, that partnership can't continue" (Desmond, 2010). The handling and outcome of each admission decision was

different, highlighting the delicate balance that must be maintained by private schools between compassion for non-traditional families and the school's fundamental, core mission.

A private Christian high school in Wichita, Kansas came under fire in 2016 when it reportedly published a "statement of understanding" regarding its admission policy (Glas, 2016).

Glas quoted the school's statement of understanding:

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

A spokesperson for the school told Glas that the statement of understanding was meant to clarify where the school stood on issues of human sexuality because the school did not condone sexual activity of any kind for its students (Glas 2016). However, the 2019 website for the school did not mention human sexuality in its admission, student conduct, or non-discrimination policies, indicating a disconnect between policies and publication of those policies.

Samantha Allen (2016), reporting for *The Daily Beast*, described a confusing situation at a well-known private Catholic academy in Rhode Island that served students in sixth through twelfth grades. In 2015, the parent-student handbook at the academy was changed to state, "[The] academy is unable to make accommodations for transgender students. Therefore, [the academy] does not accept transgender students nor is [it] able to continue to enroll students who

identify as transgender” (as cited in Allen, 2016). In a statement to *The Daily Beast*, a representative of the school said,

The policy was not intended to be discriminatory toward transgendered [*sic*] students and that it is not the school’s intent or desire to exclude transgender students... the policy was put in place for the simple reason that [the school] feels that its facilities do not presently provide the school with the ability to accommodate transgender students.

(Allen, 2016)

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

A similar incident occurred at a non-denominational Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee when two gay men were told that another education provider might be a better fit for their family (Garrison, 2015). Quoting the parent handbook, Garrison noted that all stakeholders of the school must “manifest lifestyle conduct and actions which project an image consistent with the expressed purposes, missions and beliefs of the school” (as cited in Garrison, 2015). According to Garrison, the policy cited homosexuality as an example of a lifestyle that did not project the expectations of the school. The 2019 website for the academy makes clear that the school is Christian and teaches biblical values; however, the website does not give any indication

of admission criteria and does not include a human sexuality statement or any type of policy regarding the admission of same-sex families or homosexual or transgender students.

In an era of wide-spread school choice in public schools across the United States, many educators and parents suggest that different types of private schools, including religious schools, should be encouraged in order to offer parents and students a wide diversity of school choice options. A review of popular literature points to the dissonance Christian school administrators experience when creating, enforcing, and publishing admission policies, especially with regard to admission of homosexual students and families. How do administrators balance their schools' deeply held biblical principles in a culture that is increasingly proactive regarding the legal rights of non-traditional families and children?

Affiliate Literature and Resources

Recent literature available to Catholic and Christian schools provides some guidance on matters related to same-sex marriage, homosexuality, transgenderism, and school admissions. The *Catholic Education Resource Center*, an online resource for Catholic schools in the United States and Canada, exists to help schools articulate orthodox Catholic precepts on moral, social, and religious matters (Fields, 1996). Unfortunately, minimal legal guidance related to admission policies is available at the resource center, leaving Catholic schools with a broad range of policies in individual parish schools.

Other Christian schools fare slightly better in the information arena if they are members of the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI). ACSI publishes the *Legal Legislative Update* (LLU), a trade journal for member schools dedicated to legal and legislative issues concerning non-profit religious education. In addition, the Christian Legal Society (2015) published a 23-page booklet entitled *Religious Schools & Colleges: Guidance for Same-Sex*

Issues to assist private religious schools. The Alliance Defending Freedom (ADF), another organization that provides services and resources to Christian organizations, published a legal guide, *Protecting Your Ministry* (2018), that advises all faith-based schools regarding steps they can take to maintain their religious principles. These affiliate organizations suggest that school leaders clearly communicate, in writing, the school's philosophy and beliefs so that parents know whether a private Christian school is appropriate for their children.

The dearth of research studies related to admission policies of private religious schools reveals a general lack of preparation for the cultural, social, and legal implications of *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the admission policies of private religious schools and to describe the factors that influence policies related to the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender.

Research Questions

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

1. Do private school admission policies directly address the admission of students from same-sex families and students who identify as homosexual or transgender?
2. What factors influence the admission policies of private schools regarding admission of students who have same-sex parents or students who self-identify as homosexual or transgender?

Methods

This qualitative, exploratory study utilized semi-structured interviews following the recommended procedures outlined by Creswell (2013). Interview questions (see Appendix A) were designed to ascertain ways that schools' admission policies address the admission of

students from same-sex families and/or students who identify as homosexual or transgender. The interview questions also probed the factors that private Christian school administrators consider when making decisions to approve or deny admission to students from the target groups.

Participants

After approval by the Institutional Review Board at her university, the researcher conducted semi-structured interviews of a non-random sample of private Christian school administrators who volunteered to participate in the study. Two of the five interviewees were acquainted with the researcher. Two interviewees volunteered to participate via a link on the thank-you page of a related survey, and one interview participant, an international school administrator, asked to participate in the interview via email after reading about the study in an online forum. Table 1 depicts the demographic information of the interview participants.

Table 1

Interview Participants’ Demographic Information

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

Note. n = 5. M and F refer to Male and Female gender respectively. K indicates that a school serves students in kindergarten. PreK indicates that a school serves students younger than kindergarten. SW and SE refer to the Southwest and Southeast regions of the United States.

The demographic information from this sample of Christian school administrators revealed a good deal of variability in grade levels served and school size, although the schools' geographic regions were primarily in the south. The researcher did not address the school's curricula in this study but chose to focus on admission policies.

Data Analyses

The face-to-face and telephone interviews were recorded on an Olympus VN-541PC voice recorder. The researcher transcribed each interview and redacted all personal and school identifiers in order to protect the privacy of the participants. After validating the content of the transcripts with interviewees, the researcher coded the interview responses. Meanings were formed from the repetition of words, key words in context (KWIC), and significant statements and meanings were then sorted into themes. The themes were color-coded, clustered, and categorized.

Results

Analysis of the qualitative results of the interviews revealed that only one of the five schools represented in the sample had official, written policies related to admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. All but one of the schools had statements of faith, belief statements, community life statements, or similar documents to explain the schools' beliefs and behavioral expectations to parents, students, faculty, staff, and administrators; these documents were available in either print or virtual formats. In addition, all but one of the schools had websites that communicated the Christian worldview of the school, which was promoted across the curricula. Two of the school administrators reported that they asked parents and students to sign documents indicating their understanding of the schools' beliefs and lifestyle expectations; all of the schools required their faculties to live and model

Christian lifestyles as part of their contract. Two of the five interviewees had not received applications for enrollment from same-sex parents or homosexual or transgender students. These administrators believed that the written statements of faith and beliefs would attract families with compatible beliefs and values. Four of the five administrators reported that they did not receive any type of state or federal monies. Two of the schools were open enrollment, meaning that any student could be accepted provided he or she could meet the academic requirements.

Four dominant themes emerged from the researcher's analyses of the coded interview data across the five administrators of the private Christian schools.

Theme 1: One policy is not enough. Four of the five interview participants expressed the view that children with same-sex parents could not be viewed in the same way that gay, lesbian, or transgender children are viewed. One of the interviewees stated that he did not have an official admission policy regarding homosexual or transgender parents or students; he preferred to view admissions on a case by case basis. Although S2 and S4's schools had open-enrollment policies, the administrators agreed that working with same-sex parents would be a challenge. Three interviewees were clear that they typically entered into covenantal relationships with the parents and that they could not do so with same-sex parents because the parents were living contrary to the values of the school.

Two of the administrators said they were open to the possibility of accepting homosexual students with the caveat that the students were aware of the school's teachings and that the students would be open to biblical discussion and counseling related to human sexuality. When faced with the challenge of admitting applicants from same-sex families, homosexual, or transgender students, S1 advised,

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

The decision point for acceptance at S2's school, an international school with open-enrollment, is based on whether or not the school can meet the needs of the student. The interviewee stated that the school rarely turns away an applicant. In the international school, parents must agree to abide by the school's rules and are fully informed that the student will be taught from a biblical worldview. When asked how she would advise another Christian school that faced the decision to admit a student from a same-sex family, a homosexual student, or a transgender student, she said, "Accept them and love them."

When asked what S4 would do if the same-sex family stated that they would be fine with biblical teaching, she was not certain how she would respond. Although her school functions as an independent school with an independent (non-denominational) board, it is also affiliated with a church. "We are a ministry of the [denomination] which, you may know, is having this conversation right now—about marrying [same-sex] couples and/or placing homosexual pastors in the pulpit. So, it's a sensitive issue." Although the church is not involved in the school's admission decisions, S4 believed that before making a decision for the school regarding admission of homosexual or transgender students or students from same-sex families, she would "at least run it by the pastor [of the church]." S4's school does not have a policy in place regarding the admission of students from same-sex families or students who are pursuing a homosexual or transgender lifestyle, she believes that there may be a need to develop such a policy if her federal funding or state scholarships would be in jeopardy.

Theme 2: Is gender dysphoria a fad? None of the five interview participants expressed a clear vision for working with transgender students, and none of the administrators had a written admission policy in place for transgender students. Three participants commented that transgenderism may be the latest fad among their middle school students. Participant S1 remarked:

It's popular now, in middle school, to decide you're transgender. The studies I've been looking at most recently [report] that the biggest indicating factor of a child coming to conclude they're transgender is that they have a friend, or someone close to them that is concluding the same thing. So, it's spreading more like a popular fad than anything else.

Participant S4 agreed that "it [transgenderism] has become in vogue. It's become a way for kids to identify, and they think it's kind of cool." S4 called the spread of gender dysphoria among middle school students "troubling," because "their formal operational thought is not well developed. They're trying to figure out who they are, and they sort of latch onto something like this [identity]."

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

Instead of trying to address whether it be same-sex attraction or gender dysphoria...talk about the fact that we all have to bring our attractions, our desires, our identity confusions—whether it is gender identity, the identity of being a jock, or the identity of

being a straight-A student—we have to bring those things to the cross and say, Father, how would you show me who I am?

Theme 3: A good fit. At some point during the interviews, three participants used the phrase, “a good fit.” Participant S1 said “fit” was the most important thing they looked for in a student. When asked to define the meaning of “fit” he said, “It means we are spiritually on the same page in the sense that this is a family that is going to be supporting the values of scripture.” For S1, a good fit was defined as shared values between parents, students, and the school. Participant S2, whose school has an open enrollment policy, said, “If you sense that they [the parents] cannot support the school with its policies, then a discussion would need to take place about whether the school is a good fit.” When discussing the situation of a same-sex couple’s application to his school, S3 said that if parents or grandparents are living in adultery, have a homosexual lifestyle, or are in a gay or lesbian marriage, he would tell them, “I don’t really think we share your values, and you don’t share the values that are foundational to our school. It’s going to cause a problem, so I don’t think we’re a good fit for each other.”

S4’s Christian school is a national blue-ribbon school and is open to all applicants. During the school’s tours, prospective families are informed of the school’s biblical worldview and are told that biblical teaching is integrated throughout the program. If parents were open about a same-sex relationship or the child self-reports a homosexual or transgender identity, S4 commented that she would “just be very clear” about what is taught and suggest to the family that they “might be uncomfortable with that.” In this way, the parents ultimately decide whether the school is a good fit.

Theme 4: Honesty is the best policy. One of the participants (S3) reported that the school should be careful about its written admission policy and the ways that the policy is published.

He preferred to deal with admission concerns on a case-by-case basis as they arose. He held the belief that the socio-political climate around the LGBTQ movement left him vulnerable; therefore, he intentionally chose not to publish an official policy regarding the admission of children from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students in the school's handbooks or on the school's website. However, this administrator also chose not to publish an admission policy requiring acceptance by prospective students and parents of the school's faith statement or belief system statement.

The other four interviewees stated that administrators should be clear about the school's beliefs on all matters, as well as the school's curricula and instruction. S5 noted that as part of the application process, "parents acknowledge that we are a Christian school, and our beliefs can't be contradicted at home." S5 also reported that most of the applicants found the school on its website. If parents want to begin the process of admission, they must follow the application protocol that includes filling out an application with several additional documents, coming in for a tour, and then participating in a family interview. During the interview, S5 reviews the statement of faith with the prospective family and then "we ask tough questions to make sure they aren't going to be at home promoting things that are counter to the biblical principles we are teaching them [the students] at school." Participant S2, an administrator of a Christian school with an open enrollment policy, said, "We make sure they [the parents] understand that we will teach their children from a biblical worldview... There must be an understanding of who we are as a school and what we believe." S4's recommendation to schools that face challenging admission decisions included the advice to talk to families about "what the school believes and what the Bible says. Stick to what you believe, not what you're against."

Discussion

The researcher undertook this exploratory study of private, faith-based schools' admission policies partially in response to an admission application in her school for which there was no policy to guide the decision-making process related to admission of students from same-sex families and homosexual or transgender students. An initial review of the literature revealed that only one study (Coley, 2012) was relevant to the specific topic and that the study was conducted prior to *Obergefell v. Hodges* (2015). The study surveyed school leaders of private Christian schools that belonged to the Association of Christian Schools International (ACSI) to ascertain whether Christian schools had formal policies in place to guide admission decisions regarding homosexual or transgender students or parents. Coley (2012) gathered responses from 66 leaders of member schools; the study ultimately led ACSI to stress the importance of member schools' having a written policy regarding the admission of students from same-sex parents. Coley did not recommend a specific course of action but provided several points of view offered by survey participants.

All private schools generally have some latitude when offering or denying admission to students. However, as noted in the brief review of literature in this paper, Christian schools have come under scrutiny in the media and by advocacy groups. Accusations of hate rhetoric and discrimination in popular literature and social media abound when students are denied admission to a school because the parents are homosexual or because a student claims to be homosexual or transgender (e.g., Allen, 2016; Nagle, 2016). A critical conclusion one can draw from this study is that the socio-political factors in the external environment of private schools are changing more rapidly than the admission policies of the schools.

Recommendations for Faith-based Schools

The following recommendations are borne out of analyses of the responses from the five semi-structured interviews. The recommendations are not intended to be exhaustive, nor are they intended to address the legalities surrounding admission decisions.

Write an official admission policy. Faith-based schools should have a clearly articulated admission policy and procedures that adequately reflect the biblical values of the school. Christian schools have a constitutional right to use biblical lifestyle requirements as enrollment criteria, but school administrators should be authentically transparent regarding the biblical influence on the admission policy (Alliance Defending Freedom, 2018). Every step of the admission process should clearly explain the school's beliefs, curricula, and expectations to both parents and students.

Leave no doubt about what the school teaches and believes. The school's mission and belief statements should appear on all school documents, applications, and handbooks. According to the Alliance Defending Freedom (2018), the greatest protection for private, religious schools from lawsuits and other deleterious actions comes from providing religious instruction consistent with the schools' missions and beliefs. Teachers should be required to demonstrate that biblical integration takes place consistently in all classrooms. Disciplinary procedures should also include religious instruction.

Be consistent. When applying biblical standards to the admission process, policymakers should be clear and consistent. For example, a school's leadership should be specific when stating whether their school's definition of marriage or their school's lifestyle statement applies only to homosexual couples; does the lifestyle statement extend to divorced or unmarried parents living with someone to whom they are not married? Administrators must decide whether a student who engages in homosexual behaviors should receive the same discipline as that applied to

heterosexual teens who engage in sexual intimacy in violation of school policy or expectations. School administrators should determine the behaviors and actions they will accept, be clear about the consequences of engaging in unacceptable behavior, and consistently apply the standards for all students and stakeholders.

Recommendations for Future Research

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

Sexual orientation and gender identity in middle school was addressed by three of the five interview participants in this study. Interviewees suggested, based on their observations, that transgenderism among middle school students presented itself more as a temporary identity than as a permanent lifestyle choice. Limiting the research to one sector of student groups could also provide an in-depth look at homosexuality or transgenderism in public or private schools. Future research could also explore the ways that homosexual or transgender students assimilate into private religious schools, especially when the schools provide on-going religious instruction.

A point made by all five interview subjects (that mirrored the educational experiences of the researcher) is the tendency of Christian teachers to be highly relational in their interactions with students and the students' families. Another suggestion for future research is to examine ways that Christian school administrators and teachers address and manage a student who has been in their school for years and with whom the school's stakeholders have a strong

relationship, but who identifies as homosexual in the teenage years or struggles with gender identity. This type of study would probably be qualitative and longitudinal.

A final suggestion for researchers is to carefully investigate schools that have been singled out by popular media or that have faced legal challenges due to their admission policies or for unpopular admission decisions. An examination of the historical antecedents, consequences of media scrutiny, and subsequent organizational changes of schools that have survived negative publicity may prove beneficial to private Christian school decision-makers.

Conclusion

The results of this study and a previous survey study by the researcher indicate that most faith-based schools currently do not have codified admission policies in place to guide decisions about the admission of children from same-sex families or homosexual and transgender students. Although many Christian school administrators acknowledged receiving applications from same-sex couples who desired a private education for their child(ren), the administrators also noted that there had been little to no movement toward a re-examination of or a change to admission policies that address same-sex families, homosexual students, and transgender students.

While the results of the interviews indicated that a good fit was a primary factor for determining whether to accept or deny admission to a student from one of the target groups, administrators had different criteria for defining such a mutually beneficial relationship. Other factors for consideration included the beliefs and values of the school community, the school's mission, and the views of current faculty, staff, and families.

The untapped research potential of private schools' policies, students, and outcomes is extensive. In a rapidly changing socio-political culture, further research is needed to provide guidance to faith-based schools toward best practices. Legal concerns must be tempered with compassion, and educators need the guidance and support of solid academic research.

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Appendix A

Interview Guide*

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

*The questions in this guide are representative of the information being sought by the researcher.

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