

Introduction

The research for this book was conducted between 2010 and 2016 with the book itself being written between 2013 and 2017. During this time, both the United Kingdom and the United States experienced significant political upheavals, the effects of which were felt globally. At the 2017 American Association for Applied Linguistics (AAAL) conference, a dedicated special invited colloquium was called to examine the effects of Brexit in the United Kingdom and the inauguration of the Trump presidency in the United States. The colloquium focused on the re-emergence of discriminatory or 'exclusionary discourses' in relation to particular social groups. The concept of exclusionary discourse can be applied to sexuality as its re-emergence signifies insecurity and instability concerning sexuality rights and equality issues.

At the beginning of the 2013–17 period, in his swearing-in speech at the beginning of his second term of office in January 2013, US President Obama stated his commitment to LGBT+ equality: 'Our journey is not complete until our gay brothers and sisters are treated like everyone else under the law for if we are truly created equal, then surely the love we commit to one another must be equal as well' (<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2013/01/21/inaugural-address-president-barack-obama>). By 2017, newly elected US President Trump had vehemently opposed nationwide marriage equality in the United States. Trump had also overtly supported the North Carolina HB2 law which allows businesses to discriminate against and deny services to LGBT+ people and had said he would rescind Obama's previously instated transgender equality guidance (www.hrc.org/2016RepublicanFacts/donald-trump-opposes-nationwide-marriage-equality). However, at the time of writing, Trump had backtracked, stating that Obama's executive orders relating to LGBT+ equality would remain in place. Nevertheless, the Trump administration is widely reported as continuing to be characterized by strong anti- LGBT+ rhetoric (see, for example, Trump's 2017 restoration of the military ban on transgender people – www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-41059503).

In the United Kingdom, similar progress towards LGBT+ equality has been hindered by the United Kingdom's initiation of the process to leave the European Union, and the subsequent loss of European human rights law which

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protects those identifying as LGBT+ from discrimination in particular contexts across EU countries. As far back as 2011, a Department for Education (DfE) discussion document on the future of teacher training in England and Wales stated one of its aims was to ‘help schools tackle bullying in schools, especially homophobic bullying’ (www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/media/409088/pfg_coalition.pdf). By 2017, there was a notable absence of reporting of progress towards achieving this aim. And organizations such as Stonewall were still reporting high levels of homophobic bullying in schools and other organizations in the United Kingdom, suggesting that little has changed.¹ However, in a similar vein to Trump, Theresa May has backtracked on many anti-LGBT+ statements since taking office as British Prime Minister in 2016. In fact, May has publicly apologized for her earlier votes against proposed laws to introduce an equal age of consent and same-sex adoptions in the United Kingdom. By 2017, May had voted in favour of equal marriage and had launched a review of LGBT+ asylum seekers during her tenure as home secretary.

In the United Kingdom and United States respectively, the pledges made by the DfE, May and the Obama administration have been seen by many as being significant recent steps forward in starting to address sexuality inequalities in compulsory education. In the United Kingdom, the expression of the DfE aims in 2011 was the first time that an explicit commitment to challenging homophobia in schools had been made in any formal government document and was, therefore, welcomed by many LGBT+ rights groups and educators. However, despite these aims being stated, research indicates that heteronormativity and homophobia continue to pervade schools in the United Kingdom and the United States, and that the effects of this are extremely damaging for young people identifying as LGBT+ or those who are perceived as such (see Chapters 1 and 2 for details). The aim of challenging discrimination around sexuality in schools has clearly not yet been met, and there has been criticism that the British and US governments have, as yet, done relatively little to try to effect the implementation of their stated aims. Recent political developments in UK and US governance look set to exacerbate this situation further. In addition to an increased lack of political support in both countries, it has been suggested that one of the reasons that the aims have not been achieved is that we still do not fully understand how homophobia actually works; specifically, we lack understanding of how heteronormativity and homophobia are enacted in school contexts. In order to challenge homophobia, we have to first understand what it is and how it works, and to set it within a broader examination of how sexuality discourses are formulated in school environments. A key way in which sexuality discourses (including homophobia) are enacted is through

¹ www.stonewall.org.uk.

language. Whilst work in the field of language and sexuality has examined the diverse ways in which discriminatory sexuality discourses can be linguistically enacted, little of this research has been applied to school settings where the effects of such discourses are, arguably, the most damaging due to the young age of learners.

We are living in an age which is seeing great advances in terms of LGBT+ equality in parts of the world. In the United Kingdom and the United States, there have been legislative changes and judicial rulings which enable same-sex couples to marry and have the same adoption rights as heterosexual couples. More public figures are openly LGBT+ than ever before. Although this book focuses on the United Kingdom and United States, it is important to recognize the positive changes that have been taking place in other parts of the world. For example, same-sex marriage is now legal in fifteen countries (and civil partnerships or unions are legal in several more) and there is rising support for same-sex marriage, and LGBT+ rights more broadly, in many other countries. At the time of writing, 94 member states of the United Nations had signed an LGBT+ rights declaration in the general assembly. In many Western countries, violence against LGBT+ people is classified as a hate crime. Despite these numerous legal and institutional advances in LGBT+ equality, there are evidently still many challenges and obstacles to overcome, particularly in terms of changing social attitudes towards LGBT+ identities and relationships. We continue to live in a world where anti-homosexuality laws exist in 78 countries (according to a 2013 survey by the International Lesbian and Gay Association [ILGA]). Homosexuality is punishable by death in five countries and it is punishable by imprisonment in several more.

Within the United States and the United Kingdom, the rate of hate crimes against LGBT+ people remains high and has, in fact, increased in the United Kingdom in recent years. A 2013 YouGov poll in the United Kingdom found that one in six gay or bisexual people (about 630,000 individuals) had been a victim of a homophobic hate crime in the preceding three-year period.² The survey found that lesbian, gay and bisexual people suffer wide-ranging abuse, from physical assaults and threats of violence through to harassment, verbal insults and damage to their property. The Home Office reported a 22 percent rise in reported homophobic hate crimes in the United Kingdom in 2014–15. Critics have been quick to point out that this does not necessarily indicate an increase in homophobic hate crimes, rather it may suggest that more are simply being reported to police. However, the National LGBT Hate Crime Partnership counter this by arguing that the numbers reported are still only a small fraction of the actual incidents. (Morris, 2015) Transphobic hate crimes in the United

² These statistics are discussed in an *Observer* article ('One in six gay or bisexual people has suffered hate crimes, poll reveals', *The Observer*, 13 October 2013).

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Kingdom are reported to be even higher than homophobic crimes. Figures from the LGBT+ anti-violence charity Galop show a 170 percent rise in hate crimes reportedly committed against transgender people in 2016. These findings on reported homophobic and transphobic hate crimes in the United Kingdom are further supported by research findings from Stonewall (2015).³ Even more recently in the United Kingdom, Galop reported a 147 percent rise in homophobic attacks in the three-month period following the Brexit vote. (Galop, 2016)

Similar worrying trends have been reported in the United States. In 2014, the National Coalition of Anti-Violence Programs estimated that 20–25 percent of LGBT+ people in the United States experience hate crimes within their lifetimes, with people of colour being even more at risk. This report also found that LGBT+ people in the United States routinely experience both psychological and physical violence, most physical attacks on LGBT+ people are from strangers, and victims claim that the police often fail to respond adequately to such violence. Such issues were further highlighted by the internationally reported attack on a gay nightclub in Orlando in 2016 in which 49 people were murdered. In 2016, the FBI also reported that 17.7 percent of all hate crimes in the United States were based on sexual orientation and 1.7 percent were based on gender identity (<http://ucr.fbi.gov/hate-crime/2015>). These reported rises in LGBT+-targeted hate crimes in the United States occurred despite President Obama's signing of new LGBT+-inclusive hate crimes provisions and repeated pledges to support the LGBT+ community.

In the United States in 2011, the FBI found that LGBT+-identified people suffer from more mental health problems than their heterosexual counterparts and are more at risk of suicide and attempted suicide. These risks and problems are even higher amongst LGBT+-identified young people (see, for example, the UK-based *Prevalence of Homophobia* surveys conducted by the United Kingdom's largest teaching union, the National Union of Teachers,⁴ and reports from the LGBT Foundation⁵). Homophobic bullying and harassment is still experienced as endemic in certain workplace and educational contexts. Furthermore, LGBT+ identities are still under-represented and frequently misrepresented in many public forums. It would seem, therefore, that attitudes and ideologies lag behind the structural and legislative changes that have been implemented in recent years. This situation applies to school settings, just as it does to other social domains.

³ See Stonewall's RaRE Research Report (2015) and www.stonewall.org.uk/media/lgbt-facts-and-figures.

⁴ Details of these and other relevant studies of LGBT+ identities and mental health are provided on the Schools Out website – www.schools-out.org.uk/research/contents.htm.

⁵ <http://lgbt.foundation/About-us/media/facts-and-figures>.

The teaching of sexual health issues in schools also remains problematic. Recent reports have linked poor or no teaching about different sexualities to high rates of STI infection (including HIV) among young people of all sexualities. For example, in a recent BBC news article, a young HIV+ man talks about the lack of relevant sex education he got at school (www.bbc.co.uk/news/health-30118944). As will be shown in this book, sexual health education has the potential to play a key role in challenging discriminatory discourses which are damaging to those identifying as heterosexual as well as LGBT+-identified young people.

In the United Kingdom, Stonewall have stated that what needs to be done now in terms of working towards greater LGBT+ equality is to challenge negative attitudes towards LGBT+ identities and to critically interrogate social, cultural and political ideologies which construct heterosexuality as the normal, and sometimes the only possible, form of legitimized sexual identity. In many ways, this is more difficult than achieving the legislative reforms which have already taken place. Challenging attitudes and ideologies is a longer-term task and one in which academic work will play more of a key role. Academic work on sexuality, within the social sciences in particular, is often aimed at increasing understanding of what attitudes and ideologies about sexuality circulate in particular contexts, how they circulate, what the effects of that circulation are and what happens when they are challenged. Language-focused work on sexuality uses the tools of applied linguistics to examine how particular discourses of sexuality are constructed, circulated, perpetuated and challenged through language in a range of contexts, including education. Language is a key means through which social ideologies are constructed and circulated. If we can understand how language operates in relation to ideologies about sexuality, this may enable us to begin understanding how to use language to challenge those ideologies which are detrimental to LGBT+ identities and relationships. This is a key premise underlying this book.

This book sets out to examine in detail some of the intersections between language, sexuality and education. A small number of empirical studies have examined the role that language plays in sexuality and education. Some studies, for example, have considered homophobic language use in schools, but language-focused research on sexuality and education has not yet gone much further than this. In the little research that does exist, some use has been made of narrative analysis (Moita Lopes, 2006), classroom interaction analysis (Nelson, 2012) and the analysis of linguistic signifiers of sexual identity. (Rasmussen, 2004) Nelson (2012) is critical of the fact that, in language-focused education research, there has been little dialogue between applied linguistics and queer linguistics and calls for more attention to be paid to how linguistic analysis can offer important insights into sexualities and education. This book responds to this call. The urgency of addressing language and

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sexuality issues in education is perhaps best illustrated using the words of some young LGBT+-identified people who were interviewed about their experiences of being LGBT+ in school as part of the research for this book. The short extracts below exemplify how the young people reported being subjected to explicit verbal sexuality discrimination in their schools:

JOHN: I've experienced bullying and stuff like that in school but it was when because I wasn't like out or like that and but I still got like 'you poof' and all that crap like that and it makes you feel uncomfortable because you don't wanna say 'yea and what' because then they'd know

AMY: I was playing football and I remember being on the pitch and I was playing against all the boys which you know was fairly normal really and somebody called out 'oy lezza' and it tends to be with those kinds of names those kinds of connotations it sticks like superglue and it just escalated from there really to the gradual name-calling of course everyone won't sit next to you cuz you're the lezza

But, in other cases, the young people discussed how they were made to feel marginalized not because of explicit homophobia, but because of the silences and absences in the discourses around non-heterosexual identities and relationships circulating in their schools. For example, Todd does not report experiencing explicit homophobia, but notes an absence of acknowledgement of anything other than straight sexual identities in his sexual health lessons:

TODD: you get like sexual health but it's only on straight people it was so annoying cuz I was like I know all of like straight stuff but I wanted to know about the gay stuff

Some of the teachers who were interviewed for this research raised similar issues and concerns. There were numerous comments on the ways in which the language used in schools effects discourses of heteronormativity, often in quite subtle and complex ways. The short extracts below raise many important issues concerning language, sexuality and schools which will be pursued throughout this book. In the examples below, Abbie comments on the silence around sexuality issues which is linked to the presentation of the school curriculum. David discusses the difficulties around defining what homophobic language actually is, as well as the problems in challenging it. Lauren notes that homophobic language and behaviour in schools is often 'covert' and

sometimes difficult for teachers to even notice. And Ada raises issues around the complex relationship between language, gender and sexuality.

ABBIE: it's not openly addressed it's not something which people are forced to confront I suppose through the texts that they teach I'm just thinking of some of the poetry that's on you know at key stage 4 it's not really I mean we do poetry from different cultures which brings up lots of issues but it doesn't address sexuality directly there's nothing and it addresses race a lot but it doesn't sexuality isn't in there

DAVID: things will be said there's a locker room style humour about that kind of thing isn't there which will occur and I think there's scope for us to define that a bit more so I think it's difficult because it's not necessarily directed in the same way as other things

LAUREN: it's hard isn't it cuz it's quite covert so what I perceive as being okay they might have a hard time elsewhere but in the classroom I don't pick up on it

ADA: his final year of school particularly in year 11 was not a happy one but you couldn't actually say that was homophobic bullying it was but it was the subtext of that you know 'why is he wearing hair extensions' and you know 'that's a girly thing to do'

These, and other, issues concerning the relationship between language, sexuality and schooling will be explored throughout this book, using a range of data sets and methods of linguistic analysis. A key premise is that the scope of language study in relation to sexuality is much broader than just focusing on homophobic language. Although it is important to examine explicit uses of homophobic language, a problem with only focusing on explicit homophobia is that it can deflect attention away from other (often more subtle but just as damaging) ways in which discriminatory language practices around sexuality are enacted in schools, as the extracts above illustrate. A narrow focus on homophobic language can also shift attention away from the ways in which heterosexuality is linguistically constructed in school settings and, in particular, how language works to normalize particular kinds of heterosexuality and render other sexual identities (including certain types of heterosexuality) less visible. The aim of this book is to conduct a detailed and systematic examination of the diverse ways that language can play a role in constructions of sexual identities in school contexts. The main questions asked are:

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- What can linguistic analysis reveal about how educators and young people in the United Kingdom and United States experience sexuality and sexual diversity in their schools?
- Are different sexual identities constructed differently through language? If so, how?
- Are different statuses ascribed to different sexual identities and, if so, what are these statuses and how are they achieved through language?
- Within a queer applied linguistics approach, what can the application of methods of spoken and written discourse analysis reveal about the relationship between language and sexuality in school settings?

Through answering these questions, it is hoped that knowledge of how sexual diversity is understood, constructed and enacted can be enhanced, with a view to challenging the problems around sexuality which evidently persist in UK and US schools.

The research presented in this book focuses on UK and US school contexts, with data taken from both countries. This, of course, means that the data and the research findings are of the most relevance to those contexts. However, the findings and issues addressed may be of use to academics and educators working in other countries in which similar problems around sexual diversity issues in schools have been raised.

In relation to the significance of the research findings themselves, it is also hoped that this book can convincingly demonstrate how a queer linguistics-based analysis of language in school contexts can have real-world implications for policy and practice. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, queer theory and queer linguistics have been critiqued because of their perceived limited relevance to real-world problems and situations. Throughout the book, I aim to show how a language-centred, queer linguistics framework can offer useful avenues for exploring classroom experiences and practices as sites which foster and reproduce gender and sexuality inequalities.

A Critical Discussion of Terminology

In the remainder of this introductory chapter, I introduce and discuss some key terms which are used throughout the book, followed by brief demographic information about the research sites. Many of the key terms used throughout this book are ideologically contested and difficult to define. For this reason, it seems necessary to include a critical discussion of some of these key terms in this introductory chapter. They are: *LGBT+*, *bullying*, *homophobia*, *biphobia*, *transphobia* and *heteronormativity*. These terms are related and therefore critical discussion of their meanings inevitably involves a degree of overlap.

LGBT+

'LGBT+' (lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender +) is a shorthand term for a range of non-heterosexual and non-gender-conforming sexual and gender identities. There are now various resources which provide extensive lists of 'identity terms', and the addition of the 'plus' sign (+) onto the end of 'LGBT' is an acknowledgement of the diversity of gender and sexuality identities, whilst at the same time realizing that it is not feasible to iterate or, indeed, capture all of them when discussing gender and sexuality issues.⁶ The indeterminacy of the '+' is also an attempt to go some way towards recognizing that gender and sexual identities are fluid and difficult to define. In the research presented in this book, many of the participants (and most of the young people participants) are self-identified as LGBT+. However, it is important to recognize that the school experiences of these young people are not restricted to homophobic bullying – their experiences of gender and sexuality in schools are more complex than this. Likewise, they are not the only subjects who experience homophobic bullying, as will be explained below. In fact, heterosexual-identified young people and educator participants also report experiencing damaging discourses of gender and sexuality simply because they constrain permissible or normative forms of heterosexuality which are usually highly idealized. It is also important to acknowledge that 'sexuality' can involve more than the hetero/homo continuum, especially in queer theory which underpins the approaches used throughout this book. For example, identities and relationships may be discursively constructed as normal/not normal in relation to other social dimensions of identity such as ethnicity, age and social class.

Bullying/Homophobia/Biphobia/Transphobia

In the two contextual chapters which follow this one, I discuss previous research on 'homophobic bullying' as a component of broader sexuality discourses operating in school contexts. 'Bullying' in a general sense is defined by Erhard and Ben-Ami (2016: 195) (drawing on work by Olweus, 1993) as 'verbal, physical, or relational (indirect attacks) aggressive behaviour that occurs intentionally and repeatedly in a relationship characterized by an unequal distribution of power because the victim is often unable to protect himself [sic] from the perpetrator'. They go on to specifically define *homophobic bullying* as 'an intended act meant to harm other peers psychologically based on the perceived or actual sexual orientation of the victim'. (2016: 195)

⁶ See, for example, www.stonewall.org.uk/help-advice/glossary-terms and www.stop-homophobia.com/lgbt-terms-and-definitions.

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Again, it is important to note that victims of homophobic bullying are not just self-identified LGBT+ students (in fact, these students may actually not get bullied at all), but may be any students who are *perceived* to be LGBT+. Homophobic comments are also commonly used by adolescents to stigmatize heterosexually identified peers who, for various reasons, are perceived as not meeting the peer group expectations. Monk (2011) additionally points out that ‘homophobic bullying’ itself is a complex and highly variable term ranging from ‘at one end of the spectrum, extreme repeated systematic violence, to, at the other end, overhearing the word “gay” being used in a pejorative way, being socially excluded and experiencing a sense of being different’. (Monk, 2011: 186) Throughout this book, many of the enactments of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are shown to be discursive rather than physical or overtly verbal.

The following definitions of homophobia, biphobia and transphobia are taken from the *No Outsiders* group, a team of practitioners and researchers who have conducted extensive action research into homophobia and heterosexism in UK primary schools. These are not the only possible ways of defining homophobia and heterosexism, but they encapsulate the key issues occurring throughout this book:

Homophobia/biphobia/transphobia: these terms refer both to outright expressions of prejudice, dislike or distaste towards lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans and gender variant people and also to the silencing or ignoring by individuals and institutions of these people’s identities or existence. Like institutional racism, institutional homophobia, biphobia and transphobia operate in schools as ways of marginalizing non-heterosexual and non-gender normative identities. (No Outsiders, 2010: xiii)

What is useful about the explanation above is, firstly, it emphasizes that sexuality discrimination can occur through silencing and ignoring as well as through more overt expressions of prejudice. Secondly, it highlights that homophobic, biphobic and transphobic practices function more widely to marginalize *any* identity which is perceived to be non-heterosexual and non-gender-normative.

As stated previously, this book does not restrict its focus to homophobia, biphobia and transphobia. Rather, its focus is more broadly on how gender and sexuality discourses are discursively produced in school settings. Homophobia may be part of those discourses but it is not assumed from the outset that it is the only one. A key difference here is that ‘sexuality discourses’ more broadly encompass a field of desires, identities and practices whereas homophobia responds negatively (e.g. through expressions of disdain, disgust, hatred or isolation) to social actors located in certain positions within that field. Sexuality and homophobia are further inflected by race, class and other intersectional features – although those intersections complicate the alignment between the two. In other words, homophobic invectives may be directed at subjects