

School Uniform: It's Different for Girls

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Outline of paper

- Literature on school uniforms & on girls and school uniform
- Methodology: School uniform/dress code policy of every publicly funded secondary school in Scotland (n=357) analysed
- Findings in relation to gender
- Discussion of sameness and difference in school uniform policies
- Conclusion

Reasons for compulsory school uniform

- Levelling/ egalitarian argument that school uniforms reduce social class indicators between children
- Reducing gang presence and violence
- Improve behaviour
- Security
- School ethos and identity
- Achievement

(Bodine, 2003; Gentile and Imberman, 2009; Gereluk, 2008; Lopez, 2003; Wade and Stafford, 2003).

Wider debate about efficacy of uniforms

- Mixed evidence on improved discipline and academic success (Yeung, 2009; Bodine, 2003).
- Empirical research on the effectiveness of school uniforms described as limited and inconclusive (Sanchez, Yoxsimer, and Hill, 2012; Han, 2010).
- Inconclusiveness may be attributed to several factors:
 - separate sources of measurement (e.g. asking students versus asking teachers)
 - the grade/year in which uniforms are implemented (Han 2010; Duckett, Sixsmith, and Kagan, 2008).

Reasons from Scottish Government for school uniform

- To prevent brand competition and bullying
- To promote a positive image of a school in its local community
- For security, to make it easier for school staff to identify who belongs to the school

Fitting into the male costume (not being different) but then regulated as different

- School uniform's origins from a masculine, upper-class mode of dress.
- Girls' uniforms can be classed into 'quasi-masculine' that are focused on promoting discipline and confidence, or 'feminized uniforms' that promote physical/emotional training in nurturing (Craik 2013).
- Wearing of skirts is part of 'ritualized girling' (Happel 2013).
- School dress code policies reproduce the 'white, heterosexual male norm' (Edwards and Marshall 2018).
- School uniforms have long been a symbol of class and privilege as well as being mechanisms for surveillance and discipline (Meadmore and Symes 1996).
- Children receive negative reactions to dress that does not fit what is expected of them (Graham et al. 2017).

Male/female – Masculine/feminine

- Girls' uniforms contain 'strange male traits' - contradictions between some aspects of girls' uniforms and what is considered feminine in the wider world (Okely 1993, cited in Craik 2003). 2 sets of attributes instilled in girls through this method: 'masculine' traits of discipline and leadership; and emotional attributes of self-control and self-negation.
- 'Body techniques' through uniforms that create and inscribe a series of oppositional values: 'discipline versus spontaneity; group identity/ conformity versus individuality/ expressiveness; formality versus informality; compulsion versus choice; sexuality versus sexuality; and sexual versus sexual perversion' (Craik 2003:130).

Governing of female bodies

- A key theme in the literature on gender and school dress codes is that of banning that which is deemed inappropriate or immodest which has particular implications for the governing of female bodies (Pomerantz 2007, Raby 2008).
- ‘Constrained physicality’ of girls who learn to take up limited space and monitor their physical actions (Azzarito, 2010) .

Methodology

- Applied research project which involved 12 students
- Taught qualitative data analysis software NVivo while sourcing and analysing the school uniform and/or dress code policies of every state funded secondary (post-primary) school in Scotland (n=357).
- Content analysis and thematic coding were performed on school uniform/dress code policies, school handbooks and other relevant documents.
- Further analysis by main researcher.

Applied Qualitative Research Training group, May 2019



Codes in NVivo

<input type="radio"/>	Supplier		11	11	09/08/2019 15:18
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Style of uniform		9	9	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Recycling of uniform		2	2	08/07/2020 10:33
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Reason for uniform		323	412	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Pupil choice		123	165	09/08/2019 14:28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Participation in uniform policy		40	53	09/08/2019 14:28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Non-discrimination		94	119	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Disability and medical		29	30	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Beliefs (religious or philosophical)		59	62	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Additional Support Needs ASN		6	6	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	No exceptions		51	55	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Memorable quotes		75	100	09/08/2019 14:28
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	Gender issues		1	1	26/06/2020 16:09
<input type="radio"/>	Transgender		27	29	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Skirt length vague		39	41	26/06/2020 10:44
<input type="radio"/>	Skirt length specific		2	2	26/06/2020 10:43
<input type="radio"/>	Restrictions on accessories and makeup		13	19	26/06/2020 16:08
<input type="radio"/>	Offensive items		23	26	26/06/2020 10:45
<input type="radio"/>	No mention of gender		6	6	26/06/2020 16:10
<input type="radio"/>	Modesty		24	26	26/06/2020 10:45
<input type="radio"/>	Gendered language		142	187	09/08/2019 14:28
<input type="radio"/>	Differences for boys & girls		4	4	26/06/2020 16:09
<input type="radio"/>	Decency		72	88	09/08/2019 14:30
<input type="radio"/>	Clothing considered too short		5	6	09/08/2019 16:44
<input type="radio"/>	Buttoned tops		5	5	26/06/2020 10:45

Attributes in NVivo

Case Classifications			
Name	Created On	Created By	
Organization	09/08/2019 14:28	RKS	
Name	Type	Created On	
Sector	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Size	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
School handbook available on website	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Uniform policy available on website	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Cost of uniform	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Football club wear or badges banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Hoodies banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Jeans banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Leggings banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Logos banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Skirt lengths provided	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Sports jackets banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
School supplier	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Trainers banned	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
SIMD deprivation levels	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Uniform suppliers	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
School condition	Text	09/08/2019 16:09	
Ties for girls	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Denominational	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Local authority area	Text	09/08/2019 14:28	
Mixed or single sex	Text	09/08/2019 14:52	



100%

357 SCOTTISH STATE
SECONDARY SCHOOLS



96%

HAVE A COMPULSORY
SCHOOL UNIFORM



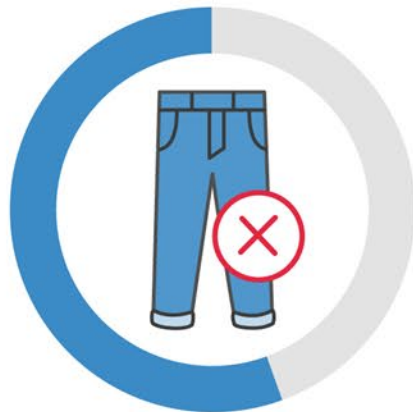
90%

HAVE A SCHOOL TIE



66%

HAVE A BLAZER



56%

BAN JEANS



24%

BAN HOODED TOPS



21%

BAN TRAINERS
IN CLASS



20%

HAVE AN EXCLUSIVE
UNIFORM SUPPLIER

Main categories of gendered policies

Differences in uniform

E.g., Girls can wear skirts, different styles of jumper

- Sometimes standard uniform plus skirts and fitted jumpers for girls
- Or: boys – trousers, shirt, jumper; girls – trousers/skirt, shirt/blouse, jumper
- Cardigans – sometimes included just for girls, sometimes for boys and girls

Example:

- *BOYS:*
- *Smart black trousers White shirt School tie Black jumper/cardigan*
- *GIRLS:*
- *Black skirt/trousers White shirt/blouse School tie Black jumper/cardigan*

Skirt lengths

Either a specific length e.g., 20-22 inches, knee length

Or vague – ‘appropriate’ ‘modesty’ – also coded at decency

- *‘Plain black school trousers or skirt of appropriate length’* typical sort of statement
- *(Very short skirts are not suitable from **a modesty perspective**)*
- *Skirts should be of an appropriate length and do not include tube skirts or designs that do not preserve the modesty of the individual.*

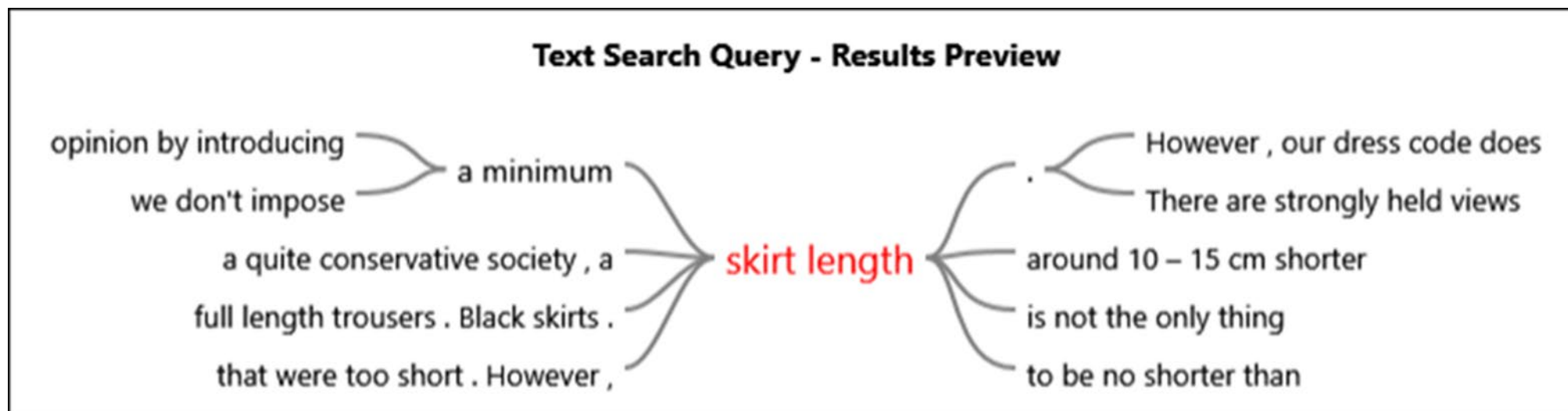
Girls

Girls’ Skirts should be of a modest and decent length. It has been suggested that we remind parents and carers that a skirt which may appear moderately short when standing may be very short and immodest when sitting. Trousers, if worn, should be dress trousers and not “drainpipe style”. Girls should not wear fashion blouses but should wear school blouses which fasten to the neck. Ties should also be fastened to the neck.

Boys

Boys’ trousers must be black and should be formal trousers.

What appears close to the words 'skirt length'



Decency: Preserving modesty and banning offensive items

- Preserving modesty – length of skirts, no bare arms or midriffs etc. – also a few mentions of having shirts buttoned up to the neck
 - Use of words like ‘reasonable’ ‘appropriate’ ‘acceptable’ and ‘decent’ – not very specific and can have different interpretations
 - Only relates to girls – no mention of boys’ shorts length apart from one swimming shorts reference
 - *‘Skirts should be of an appropriate length and do not include tube skirts or designs that do not preserve the modesty of the individual.’*
 - *‘Low cut tops, garments which show bare midriffs or exceptionally short skirts’*
 - Necklines and hemlines on girls’ uniforms must be appropriate for a school environment.
 - *no plunging necklines!*
 - *naked midriffs and unbuttoned shirts are inappropriate for our school and the Scottish climate*

Banning offensive items

- No offensive slogans/innuendos/political or religious references, no football tops
 - Focus on preventing conflict and promoting health
 - *Clothing with a design, logo or words / pictures which cause offence or are contrary to the idea of a healthy school, is not permitted.*
 - Often not gendered but can be: Sometimes includes things that are too revealing e.g., a short skirt that causes offence.
 - Common example found in multiple schools: *'Offensive clothing such as Tshirts or other items painted with obscene language or illustrations are not permitted'*
- *In addition, and in line with council policy, pupils should not wear clothing which is so tight, so short or so revealing that it may give offence to others.*
- *The school will not permit revealing forms of dress which, in the view of the Head Teacher, could cause offence or disquiet.*
- *Any dress which is likely to cause offence to others or to provoke others*

Of interest but not common

- Specific restriction on boys – *Boys-swim trunks/jammers (They must be tight fitting, not baggy or knee length) Girls-one piece swimming costume Swim Cap'*
- Same PE kit for boys and girls but the girls have extra restrictions e.g., *Modest length and not tight shorts, sports leggings not fashion leggings* – no comments on guys shorts not fitting properly or being comfortable/sporty enough
- *Our uniform has been selected, giving consideration to pupils with all gender identities.*
- *black plain skirt of the suitably professional length worn in workplaces and businesses* – skirt length & professionalism

Boys Uniform

*School tie – knot tied at neck White shirt Tailored Black Trousers School Blazer Black Cardigan or V-necked Pullover
Dark Shoes*

Girls Uniform

*School tie -knot tied at neck White blouse Black Skirt (not body con)/ Tailored Black Trousers School Blazer Black
Cardigan or V-necked Pullover Dark shoes*

Very short or tight fitting skirts are not suitable for a working day in the school environment.

Conclusions

1. Same uniform style – male basis and bias – blazer, shirt and tie – when do women ever wear ties after school?
2. More rules for girls/young women, very little that is specific for boys
3. Vagueness leads to self-censorship with terms like ‘decency’ ‘modesty’, ‘causing offence’ leading to internalized uniform gaze
4. Girls must acquiesce to the male standard but then are responsible when their bodies do not conform to the male standard

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