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Ireland increasingly positions itself as a liberal, agentic and entrepreneurial nation, motivated to move between and beyond binaries of Church/State, man/woman, advantaged/disadvantaged. Despite this, the uniformed body can be seen as a material assemblage that is intimately tied to a distinct national and cultural past and that continues to intersect religion, class and gender in complex ways.

This chapter engages with recent public conversations around school uniforms in the Irish context. For example, in September 2020 children returned to school after months of homeschooling and public health restrictions. Some schools issued directives on the daily washing of uniforms, with parents taking to social media to voice their concerns about the financial implications of this. This was not the first time school uniforms hit the headlines, with debates often focused on affordability, but more recently on issues of sexism and gender autonomy and diversity. However, the public conversation around uniforms is typically momentary and fleeting and schools continue to enforce uniform policies and police student bodies in largely uncontested ways. This chapter identifies school uniforms as a material reality that cross cuts historical dualisms and contemporary freedoms, presenting students with a multifaceted identity quandary.

The Irish School Uniform

The School Attendance Act came into being in 1926, four years after Ireland achieved independence from Britain. The Act made attendance at school compulsory for all children between the ages of six and fourteen, and in doing so visibilised the Irish school going child in a way that often alluded national imagery previously. This was not surprising, given that during the eighteenth century and indeed much of the nineteenth century many Irish children attended secret and illegal 'Hedge Schools'. Even after the repeal of Penal Laws, the government's policy on education remained unchanged, providing state-aided instruction to children who were native English speakers and of accepted Protestant affiliation (Lyons, 2016). Outlawing Catholicism, Presbyterianism and the Irish language was a deafening threat to national identity. Children whose families could afford Hedge Schools received instruction near hedges or rivers, 'under overhanging rocks, in mud huts, in barns, in chapels, in the homes of people or, in rare instances, in the teacher's own house' (Lyons, 2016: 28). These secret schooling arrangements grew in popularity and by the mid-1820s approximately 9,000 Hedge Schools were attended by 400,000 pupils (McManus, 2002). Therefore, by the time the 1926 School Attendance Act came into effect, Irish children had a checkered history of nonattendance and invisible attendance at school and it is arguable that this was not convincingly addressed until the introduction of free post-primary education in 1966.

Although Ireland achieved independence before uniforms became commonplace in schools, the style of uniforms typically introduced largely resembled those of private schools in England. Ireland remained relatively impoverished until the 1980s and Church funded schools provided the State with significant financial respite. Those Church run schools - predominantly Catholic - were also in direct competition with private schools in England prior to the introduction of free post-primary education in Ireland, which is another likely reason for uniform similarities. Starched collars, stiff ties, long pleated skirts, rigid trousers and woollen jumpers are often thought to be products of Catholic influence and control, stifling bodies into conservative conformity. In reality, there is nothing specifically Catholic about these uniforms, and while their conservative style might have served the purist pursuit of the Catholic Church well, in essence Irish uniforms have always borne an undeniable resemblance to school uniforms in the United Kingdom. Even today, the only notable difference is the absence of a blazer in the majority of schools in the Republic of Ireland. Where blazers do feature, they are most likely to be in private post-primary schools and often reserved for special school ceremonies and celebrations. It is likely that this has always been the case, as historic imagery from the 1950s onwards, firmly locates the blazer within male, aristocratic school settings. Today, school specific jackets can be observed in many post-primary schools but these are more akin to an anorak than a formal blazer. The absence of the school blazer is as emblematic of its classed, gendered and national significance, as is its presence.

Initially the preserve of post-primary schools, by the turn of the twenty-first century, school uniform policies had largely been adopted by primary schools in Ireland also. Along with the UK, Cyprus and Malta, Ireland is unique in Europe, for its normalisation of school uniforms (Shanks and McKinney, 2022). Affluence and location have been identified as factors in schools choosing to have a uniform in contexts such as the United States (Brunsma, 2006), but in Ireland uniforms are a prominent feature across almost the entire primary and post-primary terrain. Ireland's embracing of school uniforms is likely due to the perception of uniforms as an equalising social apparatus. The role of uniforms in 'levelling the playing field for children' and ensuring that 'all children look alike whether they are from rich and poor families' are principal motivations in the discourse on school uniforms (Bodine, 2003: 52). The function of school uniforms in the pursuit of 'egalitarianism' (Friedrich and Shanks, 2021: 3), parity and equality of opportunity is undeniable and these are particularly pertinent in a state with a history of educational turbulence and injustice. However, the 'fairness function' of uniforms has come under scrutiny in recent times with increasing debate about whether the cost of uniforms itself is prohibitive to accessing education. For example, in September 2020 children returned to school after months of homeschooling and public health restrictions owing to the COVID-19 pandemic. Some schools issued directives on the daily washing of uniforms, with parents taking to social media to voice their concerns about the financial implications of this. Public health restrictions disrupted the enforcement of uniform policies and gave rise to new lines of debate, but at their core was a conversation about the relationship between school uniforms,

affordability, identity and materiality which had been gaining momentum for many years.

National Government and School Governance

School Governance, including the adoption of uniform policies, generally falls within the remit of individual Boards of Management in Irish schools. The Irish Government has no say on the specific items that should form a uniform or on whether schools should adopt uniform policies in the first instance. That said, political representatives are not without views on school uniforms and those views are most audible for fleeting periods each summer as constituents struggle with return to school costs. The Irish Government provides a Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BTSCFA) for families that meet specific income criteria. In July 2022, Departments of Education and Social Protection announced that the BTSCFA would increase by €100 from €160 to €260 for children aged 4-11 and from €285 to €385 for children aged 12-22. They estimated that approximately 151,000 families would benefit from the measure with respect to over 262,000 children (Department of Education/Department of Social Protection, 2022). However, a 2022 survey conducted by children's charity Barnardos estimated that the cost of sending a child back to primary school could be as high as €424 and €811 for a child in post-primacy school (Barnardos, 2022). School uniforms form a significant part of back to school costs, particularly when schools insist on pre-crested or clothing with logos that is only available from specific suppliers. In 2017, the Department of Education issued circular 0032/2017 which set out cost-effective practices to be adopted by schools to reduce, among others, uniform costs. The circular was unequivocal in its directive, that:

- (a) All elements of a school uniform should be purchasable from various stores;
- (b) Only "iron on" or "sew on" crests should be used;
- (c) Wherever possible, generic rather than branded items should be specified (e.g. uniform, clothing, IT tablets, sports equipment etc.)
- (d) Provide parents with a list of all required items and indicate the likely costs of these required items at best value stores (Department of Education, 2017)

Despite the clarity provided in the circular, its implementation has been ad hoc with many schools remaining autonomous in their identification of suppliers and seemingly unchallenged in their continued insistence on expensive pre-crested uniforms.

The Irish Government assumes a relatively neutral stance on school uniforms, with limited contribution to the uniform narrative beyond the affordability discourse. This is interesting given the material significance of the uniformed body as an illustration of the properly educated, professionally agile and personally responsible young Irish citizen. In 2015, Ireland became the first country in Europe to develop a National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making. The strategy was part of successive Governments' cross-departmental commitment to Ireland's ratification of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child and EU Charter of Fundamental Rights. The strategy centred on the everyday lives of children and

young people and on the places and spaces where they are entitled to have a voice in decisions that affect their lives such as community, education, health and well-being, and legal settings (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2015). In terms of education, the strategy facilitated and formalised young people's voice in key areas such as curriculum development and school evaluation. However, there has been no similar formalisation of their right to voice on school uniforms, at the level of either policy or practice. In post-primary schools young people engage with curriculum learning outcomes in subjects such as Civic, Social and Political Education and Politics and Society that encourage them to critically interrogate the operationalisation of power and decision making in schools. The implementation of uniform policies is a common focus of debate in these classrooms, as it is in Student Council forums, yet in reality, little change has occurred. Irish schools historically tend to reflect the wider changes in society regarding curriculum but have remained highly conservative in terms of how students should present themselves physically (McSharry and Walsh, 2014). Ireland unreservedly positions young people as rights holders and freethinkers, yet as one newspaper suggested we continue to 'kit out our children like miniature adults from the 1950s' (Feely, 2014). The article claimed that uniforms vary only in their silliness, typically including shirts and ties, pullovers or cardigans, and trousers or skirts - items with 'lots of tiny, fiddly buttons to defeat little fingers; a tight, stiff collar to chafe against the tender skin of the neck; and tights that can't be put on by a small girl' (ibid). The description elicits the relatable, palpable and unfathomable corporeal experience that emerges when soft physical contours meet tricky, tailored structures. Yet, school uniforms have remained largely uncontested and undisputed, and there are a number of possible reasons for this.

It is arguable that just as rigid, conservative school uniforms served the purist pursuits of the Catholic Church, they have also served the professional pursuits of the State. Ireland has strived to establish itself as an epicentre of educational and economic ascendancy. In 2021, 63% of 25 to 34-year-olds were tertiary educated, increasing from 30% in 2000 and at a faster pace than most other countries in the OECD (OECD, 2021). And even though Ireland is not as rich as it is sometimes portrayed, the Irish economy remains among the world's richest (Ó Gráda and O'Rourke, 2022). For a modestly sized country, with a long history of peasantry and unconvincing economic progress for the first 60 years of independence, Ireland's current position of relative prosperity, has required careful self-styling around the ideologies of professionalism and capability. The correctly worn school uniform, with its official appearance, epitomises the 'public body... dressed for the formal conditions of the professional workplace' (Entwistle, 2002: 141). The uniform symbolises compliance and cooperation, community and ceremony. It is often aligned with notions of 'proper schooling' (Sabic-El-Rayess, 2019: 3). The meticulous surveillance of uniforms in schools is frequently justified as a tool for shaping confident and responsible citizens who are more likely to succeed in a competitive labour market (Friedrich and Shanks, 2021; Olsson and Shanks, 2022). Strict implementation of uniform policies and policing of student bodies are excused as necessary aspects of successful school governance (ibid). The well worn uniform signifies the quality of school leadership and acts as a recognisable cue to wider society about professionalism, power and pride

(Baumann and Krskova, 2015). However, some might argue the traditional uniform is at odds with Ireland's positioning of itself and its citizens as liberal, agentic and free thinking. This relational unease has come into particularly sharp focus since the COVID-19 pandemic and the disruption to uniform policies caused by public health restrictions, which was illustrated by one particularly high-profile case.

The Case of the Carlow Assemblies

In November 2020 a story about the implementation of uniform policy in a mixed post-primary school in County Carlow made national news. The story claimed that 'Deans of Discipline' called female students to assemblies where they were instructed not to wear tight fitting leggings for PE. They were allegedly told that such clothing was distracting for male teachers. The story was reported in a local newspaper, but soon attracted much national attention. On Twitter, news of the story resulted in thousands of tweets, retweets and comments. In the main, the reaction was one of disbelief and condemnation. Parents, politicians and the general public converged on the story, criticising the school for its seeming archaic attitude towards girls and a public shaming of their bodies. One city mayor tweeted that the girls should wear whatever they wanted and called on teachers to 'do better' - to stop blaming and shaming the wrong party. One Teachta Dála (member of the Irish Parliament) tweeted that such an objectification of girls and identification of their bodies or clothes as problematic for men was a cause of gender based violence and victim blaming, while another called for an immediate apology from the school. Some comments suggested the need for police involvement if male teachers found their students' bodies or clothing 'distracting'.

One national newspaper reported that an anti-sexism petition entitled 'sexism against female students in school', which was circulated on social media in response to the incident attracted almost 4,000 signatures in two days (Phelan and McNamee, 2020). A national radio station reported that students hung up posters in the school the week after the incident, demanding that the focus should be on teaching men how to respect women rather than on teaching women how to dress (O'Riordan, 2020). It was claimed that a survey had been distributed by students amongst the wider student population to gauge attitudes towards the message conveyed at the assemblies. Notices subsequently hung in the school claiming that, based on the survey responses, the incident made students feel 'uncomfortable, degraded, paranoid, violated, disgusted, unsafe' (ibid).

By the time the Carlow school story was put to the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) for comment, the school Principal had undertaken an interview on national radio where he insisted that nothing 'inappropriate, wrong or uncomfortable' (RTÉ Radio Archive, 2020) was said to the girls. He acknowledged that the assemblies had taken place but described them as normal gatherings to remind students of existing uniform policy, rather than a 'body-shaming' exercise (ibid). He explained that prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, students had changed into school specific tracksuits on days when PE was timetabled. However, those

changing facilities were not in use in November 2020 because of public health restrictions. Instead, students were permitted to wear PE clothing to school on the days PE was scheduled. However, what started out as a response to public health guidelines, resulted in PE uniform regulations not being followed. Girls were choosing alternative clothing, particularly leggings and this had become increasingly more akin to a 'fashion show', according to the Principal (RTÉ Radio Archive, 2020). He described this as a cause of concern for himself personally and for other members of staff. He said boys were not called to the assemblies because the issue 'primarily was with the girls' (ibid). He insisted that the assemblies were nothing more than a normal reminder of uniform policy by the school's Deans of Discipline and that no reference had been made to the reaction of staff to tight clothing. He criticised the publication of 'unsubstantiated facts' in a local newspaper that had left staff 'bemused' and 'annoyed' and described the subsequent reaction on social media as 'scandalous' and 'damaging to staff' (ibid).

Following the Principal's radio interview, there was some backlash on social media against irresponsible and unethical journalism. However, this generated significantly less interest than the original story. The ruling by the Press Ombudsman in June 2021 confirming that the newspaper that originally reported the alleged incident had breached a number of accuracy principles, was also less reported. The judgement by the Press Ombudsman was that the newspaper's front page story was not supported by adequate and verifiable sources, both of which were necessary to confirm the story's accuracy (Daly, 2021). The judgement provided some vindication for the school but in many respects the reputational damage had already been done and relationships of trust had already been severed. Only those present at the assemblies in November 2020 know for certain what was said, conveyed or implied. However, we do know for certain that school uniform policies were disrupted by COVID-19 and that this challenged schools in a number of ways. It has caused some schools to gravitate completely towards school tracksuits, others to adopt a more relaxed approach, allowing students to choose between school tracksuits and formal school uniforms and others to grapple with reclaiming strict pre-pandemic uniform practices. Whatever the truth of the assemblies in Carlow, the incident symbolises a relational unease between the implementation of uniform policy and the realisation of young people as rights holders, particularly in relation to gender.

Skirts and Trousers

Outside of Malta, Ireland has the highest percentage of sex segregated schools in Europe, standing at 17% for primary schools and 33% for post-primary schools (Department of Education, 2022). Sex segregation does not occur in pre-school settings, in further and higher education settings or in the workplace. The Department of Education's plans for the future of sex segregated schools are clear in that it has not sanctioned the creation of a new single-sex school since 1998. Nonetheless, single-sex schools, most of which are denominational, remain a popular choice for parents, arguably informed by the rhetoric of legacy and civility. In Ireland, school selection is not based on

centralised systems or academic scores. Previous research indicated almost half of post-primary students, particularly those living in urban areas, did not attend their nearest or most accessible school (Smyth et al., 2004). While newcomer students and those from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to attend their local schools (Smyth et al., 2009), middle-class, highly educated parents are 'likely to seek out schools that ensure academic success and status perpetuation for their children' (Darmody, Smyth and McCoy, 2012: 20). The Schools Admissions Act 2018 was established to ensure greater fairness and transparency with regard to school enrolment, but parents have maintained considerable autonomy in school selection and are entitled to send their child to any school of their choosing provided a place is available. Studies continue to dispel any academic advantage to single-sex schooling (Clavel and Flannery, 2022). Irish schools provide little quantitative information on academic signifiers to parents (Doris, O'Neill and Sweetman, 2022). However, The Sunday Times publication of Ireland's top ranking schools acts as a convenient annual reference point and this paints an interesting picture of segregated and mixed schools. Based on the average proportion of students gaining places in Irish universities and a number of prestigious colleges in 2017, 2018 and 2019 eight of the ten top ranking schools were all-girls schools, one was an all-boys school and one was mixed (Burton, Murphy and Coxon, 2019). Such statistics act as convincing fodder for parents who previously attended a single-sex school or have personal, professional or ideological connections with such schools and wish for their children, particularly 'their girls', to inherit the same educational legacy. Notions of shared sisterhood, sorority and success continue to protect the traditional and territorial aspects of girls' schools and preservation of the school uniform is often central to this. Therefore, entrenched in paradigms of custom and convention, middle-class all-girls schools have been slowest to embrace trouser options for girls and to move away from the uniform skirt.

In 2016, the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network, supported by the Department of Education, issued guidelines for schools with regards to uniform policy and gender diversity. It was advised that transgender or intersex students should be permitted to wear a uniform consistent with their gender identity (GLEN, 2016). The report stated that:

At a minimum a gender neutral option should be offered. For example, single-sex girls' schools may need to consider allowing trousers to be worn. Single-sex boys schools may need to consider a variation in uniform options. (ibid: 21)

It is notable that trousers are explicitly suggested as an option for all-girls schools but skirts are not mentioned as an option for all-boys schools. This is particularly interesting when set against the backdrop of images of 'skirted' school going boys in nineteenth and early twentieth century Ireland. Young boys, particularly those based in rural areas, can be seen in distinctive flannel dresses with bare legs and feet. However, many Irish schools prohibit those who identify as male, and those who have transitioned from male to female, from wearing skirts (TENI, 2015). This practice is likely to face significant

challenges going forward, but until recently, it has been girls, understood through a binary lens, who have been central to the school skirt debate.

Irish schools have embraced feminist ideals of equality and success for girls in terms of academic achievement, but many schools have retained quite a conservative outlook on the sexualisation of young 'ladies'; an outlook that is at odds with wider culture (McSharry and Walsh, 2014). The socio-historical meaning of the uniform skirt has undoubtedly evolved over time. Once the sign of an independent Ireland with girls visibly accessing education, the school skirt is viewed by some as clinging to outdated versions of gender. However, accordion pleats and tartan patterns maintain a prevalent position in single-sex and mixed Irish schools, even though some context specific differences in style are notable. For example, in many schools in County Limerick ankle length skirts are worn, while in the adjoining County Cork, skirts are typically worn above the knee. In an exploration of the Korean context, Park (2013) also noted slight differences in uniform style depending on location, with some areas seeing uniforms worn both shorter or tighter than others. Variations in skirts act as a clear reminder that uniform style is as much about culture and tradition as it is about functionality. For school staff, each length and width brings with it a set of policing requirements and associated rewards and punishments. It enables school administration to patrol gendered borders, particularly in the enforcement and (re)production of acceptable forms of girlhood (Pomerantz, 2007) and facilitates a type of patrolling that, in the main, only applies to girls' attire (Aghasaleh, 2018). For students, the length and width of skirts, as well as accompanying accoutrements such as tights and socks and associated activities such as tanning and hair removal, require a specific type of socialisation. The school skirt demands exposure of the body, but in meticulously monitored and predetermined ways (McSharry and Walsh, 2014). It 'demands a particular type of gender performance' (Happel 2013, 93) and a discernibly refined 'middle classness' (McSharry and Walsh, 2014). In schools, where there is a choice of skirt or trousers, many students continue to select the school skirt, embracing the gender performance it necessitates and mediates. In schools, where skirts remain compulsory, however, the skirt is often equated with a lack of choice and an infringement of personal freedom.

In Spring 2022, a group of post-primary students from an all-girls school in Dublin made national news for their campaign to end skirt-only uniform policies. Their social media campaign #whowearsthetrousers encouraged other schools to join the movement to end mandatory skirts. They described 'ladylike' skirt rules as outdated and a hindrance to free movement, particularly cycling (O'Brien, 2022). Their theory is backed up by research, which found that a uniform skirt inhibits cycling (Norrish et al, 2012). Again, the style of uniform skirt is of importance as recent research in Limerick city found that boys are approximately 18 times more likely to cycle to school than girls (7.1% vs 0.4%) and that this is significantly impacted by long skirts, which were mandatory for all of the girls involved in the study (Higgins and Ahern, 2021). For the #whowearsthetrousers campaign, COVID-19 was, once again, cited as intensifying an already unacceptable situation, where girls bare legs bore the brunt of open windows and winter temperatures. Some social media comments in response to the campaign indicated ongoing nostalgia towards the idea of

'good girls in smart skirts', but most contributors were aghast that such a campaign was still necessary in contemporary Ireland. The inability to wear trousers seemed irreconcilable with gender equality and gender diversity.

Women's rights, particularly in relation to bodily freedom and autonomy, have gained considerable recognition in Ireland in recent years. There is a palpable sense of victory and accomplishment in the air, and school trousers seem like one more battle that needs to be won. Trousers appear, perhaps, like an obvious way of unshackling girls from endless school surveillance and self-checking. Happel (2013) suggests that either consciously or unconsciously, skirt wearing imposes considerations of (im)modesty, in ways that trousers do not. However, if the case of the Carlow school assemblies has exemplified anything, it is that the regimen of surveillance and expectations of decency, are not solely about skirts. In Carlow, it was girls' leggings that were problematised and allegedly posed a threat to moral order. Pomerantz (2007) maintains that rather than responsibility for the school's moral climate falling on the shoulders of school management and staff, it is frequently a burden placed on girls more than any other group. Pomerantz continues, that non-compliance carries accusations of deviance, indecency and dishonour. Seemingly naive girls are positioned as 'at risk' and in need of help and guidance (ibid). However, whatever the reality of the school assemblies, it was these very positionings of girls that caused public outrage.

To finish...

And time for some personal insights! My work has taken me to hundreds of schools throughout the Republic of Ireland over the years. The schools I visit are similar in that they are all post-primary schools but they are diverse in terms of geography, denomination, social class and gender. My visits have overwhelmingly confirmed the popularity of school uniforms in Ireland. I have also been left in no doubt that school uniforms and individual uniform items, inscribe class, gender and national identity on bodies in distinct ways. At a mere glance, I can differentiate between junior and senior students based on the colour of their jumpers. In one all-girls school, I was able to identify individual year groups based on the coloured tag on their (otherwise identical) black shoes. I can distinguish student council members and prefects from head girls and head boys based on their badges. I can tell which boys have made it into prestigious school rugby teams based on their exclusive ties. In each case, the school uniform is coded with recognisable markers of hierarchy and success. These material differences confer those who have reached a distinctive level or goal with discernible embodied gravitas. Uniforms divide, hierarchise and homogenise (Friedrich and Shanks, 2021), yet in doing so, ironically, they also create community and membership. The hierarchising features of uniforms are, on the one hand, exclusionary and discriminatory; on the other hand, they are the 'non-human matter' (Fox and Alldred, 2022) that are the hallmarks of insider ritual and understanding and of institutional appreciation of ambition and accomplishment.

There is an ongoing narrative in Ireland that aligns divestment of the Catholic Church from schools with liberation from conservatism and control. This

narrative leans towards new non-denominational schools as the way forward in facilitating and nurturing individual freedom, creativity and autonomy. In such schools, the constraints of uniforms are removed and the potential for self-expression is perceived to be limitless. However, this isn't necessarily the case. Dress codes in these schools can be more granular, detailed and prescriptive than any uniform policy. They often include statements similar to the following: skirts and shorts must be on or below the knee; leggings must be in no way transparent; if leggings or tight jeans are worn, they must be accompanied by a top long enough to satisfy the fingertip rule; backs, bottoms, chests, stomachs and all underwear must be covered. Perhaps informed by Church morality, or maybe colonial oppression or modern discourses of professionalism, or a combination of all of these, what these statements tell us is that decisions about respectability and decency are much more far reaching than Catholic schools.

So, it could be suggested that uniforms are restrictive and debilitating; preventing young people from dressing in ways that are personally authentic and self-expressive. It could also be argued that it is actually the uniform that facilitates authenticity of self and liberates young people from constraining social forces. Through uniforms, children are somewhat protected from the pressures of competitive dressing and the demands of the latest fashions (Bodine, 2003; Shanks and McKinney, 2022: 29). The school uniform provides the child, and the planet, with much needed respite from commercial manipulation and fast fashion. Through uniforms, schools have been 'doing sustainability' long before its social and scientific significance took centre stage. By levelling the playing field, uniforms allow children to be 'free to just be themselves' (Bodine, 2003: 60); to focus on learning, making connections and fulfilling their aspirations. Therefore, rather than being viewed as a violation of individual rights, the young person's educational rights might just be realised through the uniform. This is why parents around the world, including Ireland, seek support in acquiring uniforms each year. The right to have a uniform is as convincing as the right to not have a uniform.

If uniforms have such equalising and enabling potential, why is their position in Irish education so frequently debated and doubted? It is likely that this comes back to the very real experiences of thinking, feeling bodies. To illustrate this, I will draw on one personal observation. On a visit to a school a number of years ago, I witnessed a heated, rather one sided conversation, between a teacher and a student. As I waited outside the staffroom for the teacher I was visiting to emerge, a senior student who was walking past with a group of friends was singled out by a teacher. He was asked why he was wearing white runners and not black shoes. Without sufficient time to reply the question was put to him again. He tried to articulate an explanation but at every syllable he was shut down and the only resounding sound that could be heard was the word 'detention'. Even a stranger could feel the 'realness' of this experience; singled out from friends, scrutinised by onlookers, chastised in public, refused the right to reply, punished with detention; all because of the 'wrong' shoes. If it was material circumstances that led to the 'wrong' shoes being worn to school, then the altercation was a clear reproduction of dis/advantage in salient and symbolic ways. Rather than levelling the playing field and drifting into the background so the focus can be on meaningful learning, in these instances the

uniform (or lack thereof) is foregrounded. We are reminded of the Carlow assemblies, where calling students out of class for 'Deans of Discipline' to remind them of uniform policy was not disputed, explained or excused. Policing bodies for the good of the institution 'produces the accounts of bodies as if they were texts, acted upon by social forces, rather than the flesh and blood material of.. embodied existence' (Entwistle, 2002: 148). The uniform no longer offers equality or protection, but comes to be yet another social force attempting to inscribe power on the body; a cultural reality prioritised over corporeality. Against the backdrop of wider socio-cultural proclamations of bodily autonomy and sensibility, 'unreasonable' uniform policies (and dress codes) seem unsustainable. They come to represent material reality where historical dualisms collide with contemporary freedoms, and this presents students in Ireland with a multifaceted identity quandary.

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