<u>Usefulness, uselessness and usability</u>
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Introduction

In this essay, I will be discussing the utility of uniforms in society. Through my research you will see how it can be either beneficial or detrimental and I will identify pros and cons of uniforms in society. I intend to show that this topic is universally relevant and creates an interesting conversation about its utility within society. As previously stated, through my research of utility I want to look at how uniforms can have both pros and cons in society and how this then poses the main questions of my essay; 'what is the use of uniform?', who are the users, and who are they influenced or controlled by to wear uniforms?

 Do uniforms have a physical or emotional purpose within society?. I will be assessing this through a brief overview of how societies use uniforms to construct their social norms. Although males have also been socially stereotyped by uniforms, for the purpose of this essay, I want to primarily focus on how female uniforms have been influenced by society's 'norms' and by stereotypical ideas of the female form both globally and within Ireland . These are primarily influenced by various groups such as religions, employment sectors, sports and education.

However, I will focus on uniforms/clothing within the workforce,education and sports . In this assignment you will also see how I compare and contrast two eras within Ireland, the mid 1900's and to the early 2000's and how the evolution of societies creates new social 'norms'. I will attempt to show how the society at the time constructed its views and purpose of female uniforms within education and sport.

Religion + School

Globally Uniforms have been used for centuries and are a significant universal element in society. We all have experienced wearing a uniform whether that is for school, work or sports. So in this assignment I will discuss the use of uniforms within the work,education and sports both globally and Ireland. I will exhibit how other groups like religious orders, in general, have essentially contributed to this.Firstly, uniforms have been used globally in schools from as early as playschool/kindergarten to as late as even third-level education. I found from my research that Thailand values uniform so much that it uses it in third- level education. Thai universities place a major emphasis on the preservation of Thai cultures (Bovornsiri & Fry, 1991; Rhein, 2016) and uniform is a way Thai culture tries to preserve this. In comparison to Ireland where uniform is only used within education up until second-level education.

The pros of uniforms is that they are used in the majority of religious and other social groups as a way of identification and solidarity. As discussed by Joseph and Alex in their article 'The Uniform: A sociology perspective' (1972) religious clothing is a 'costume used to identify similar appearance, distinctiveness, or uniformity of a group' this gives people who wear these uniforms a sense of community and

self-worth. This is similar just to what is seen in secondary schools as they use different crests, colours of jumpers,trousers and ties to differentiate their schools.

Summary uniform within education
In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, Ireland's education system was heavily influenced by the catholic church. Irish females were restricted in secondary education as the influence of these christain 'traditions' and social norms both academically and even their uniforms.

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The Catholic Church was heavily in power of Irish society , they ran chapels, schools and local events e.g hall dances. Indeed, the threat posed by these dances to social order was deemed to be so great that the Public Dance Halls Act was introduced in 1935 to 'make provision for the licensing, control and supervision of places used for public dancing and related matters' (O'Connor 2003, p58). The Act shows how the Church and the State collaborated at this time to build and govern "an ideal Irish body politic...through the moulding and control of individual citizens' bodies" (O'Connor 2003, 53). This strict control and heavy influence the Catholic Church had on society of this era was also applied to education. Schools in Ireland in this era would have been run by nuns and priests e.g Loreto Convent Secondary School, Letterkenny, creating more ways for the Catholic Church to influence Irish society. Females in this era would have not had the same privileges as males. This is seen in all aspects of schooling. The Irish annual statistical reports shown in the book 'Sé Sí - gender in Irish Education' between 1930-1968 discusses how 'arithmetic-girls only', which later developed to 'elementary mathematics(for girls only) ' were separate intermediate certificate subjects. The reports from that era show that elementary maths was for girls that were seen as "unsuitable for Higher-level maths' and Higher-level was "not an option they were offered"(Sé Sí,pg5) from the education of this era.This type of treatment was also seen in the use of uniforms.
Girls in this era would have worn very stereotypical 'female' uniforms. These uniforms were very strict and conservitive just like the religious clothing 'drapery'. As stated in an article 'A uniform approach to documenting Catholic school education' by Debbie Schaefer-Jacobs, a Catholic girls school uniform 'stereotypically consists of a pleated plaid skirt or jumper (a sleeveless dress), Mary Jane or saddle shoes, a blouse, and a sweater' where boys wore 'dark trousers'. Girls generally didn't have the option to wear trousers only skirts and this is another element of how females are generalised with 'femininity' through uniform.
In Ireland sex and sexuality were perceived badly in Irish culture during the early and mid nineteen hundreds due to the influence of the Catholic church when we compare it to what we see today in Ireland.

As seen in this image from this era, a widower who is disobeying "the guidelines of the catholic church" by cohabiting with a woman that is not his wife and the two men on the right show emotions of anger and disgust displaying the views that Irish culture had on relationships in this era. The use of bleak and cold tones also gives off a sense of sadness in this illustration.

As stated before this mindset was influenced by the hierarchy of this era, that being the Catholic Church

At present The Catholic Church's influence is still present in today's Irish society as some schools are still run by the catholic church in Ireland, for example 'Our Lady's Secondary School, Templemore' is still run by nuns in 2020.

However, in comparison to the mid 1900's its influence has decreased largely. As discussed in the 'Has the time come to reduce the number of Catholic dioceses in Ireland?', an article in The Irish Times by Finola Kennedy, the dramatic decline in active diocesan priests has declined from '3,801 to 1,728, a decline of more than 50 per cent' in the last 40 years' this is a prime example showing how the traditional things like religion aren't in as high of demand.

Ireland has grown largely as a more accepting society , it being the first country in Europe to leaglise same-sex marriage-, making Ireland "the first country in the world to do so by popular vote' back in November 2016 as stated in The Guardain(H.McDonald,2015). This increasingly more acceptable society pushed Irish teenagers in schools to fight for uniform rights.

The utility of skirts for girls uniforms is 'outdated' states Ciara Fanning, president of the Irish Second-Level Students Union (The Irish Times) where she further goes on to explain why not having both the option of a skirt and trousers is just impractical. Fanning attended Loreto secondary school in Clonmel, Ireland and states ' there's a sense of what a girl is supposed to look like' from the strict uniform available. In conclusion this results in the exclusion of some students causing inequality . These types of uniforms are seen as impractical for girls this day and age as many girls especially around the Dublin area want to cycle to school but their skirts get 'caught in the chain' and are 'freezing' during the winter times (Fanning, C.2020) . A study with the CSO on commuting in Ireland found that in 2016 '0.4 percent of girls aged 13-18 years of age cycled to school which is a lot less compared to the 3.7 percent boys that cycle. This is another statistic that highlights the issue and impracticality of the female uniforms. Although these issues have now been addressed this is a

prime example of how when we live in an evolving society this affects the use of uniform and 'norms' .

Schools that are still fighting for their desired uniform policies like Loreto secondary school clonmel tend to be under the Catholic Church influence in comparison to the more newly introduced schools brought into Ireland (e.g Educate together/community schools).

Educate together schools are national schools that were first founded in Ireland around the 1980's. These schools are a perfect representation of inclusivity as they are 'democratically run' rather than under the one catholic/christrian belief , accommodating to more students' cultures and beliefs. Although the use of a no uniform has its positives and negatives. The positives of not wearing a uniform for students attending 'educate together' states on the Educate together website that this 'empowers the individuality of the students" allowing the students to express themselves and feel comfortable internally and externally in their environment.
 However, stated by Louisa Meehan in her article 'opinion:forget the school uniform its outdated" (journal.ie) she discusses how having to purchase a uniform every year is costly and that 'Parents are under so much pressure' as it is and having uniforms being an add-on to this would 'be a relief' . In conclusion Meeha discusses a variety of reasons why using uniforms within secondary schools should not be compulsory and by having assigned uniforms this initially undermines the schools promise of a free education by imposing an extra expense on families.

Workforce

As stated ,Joseph and Alex view that uniform is not only attire that an individual wears, it also symbolises membership of a group while excluding others not within this group. The use of uniforms can have both positive and negative effects. A positive effect is that uniforms can be a useful element in society as it can help define roles within the workforce and assist these people in our society both mentally and physically. For example, in roles such as firefighters, their uniforms contribute to their safety and assists in helping them in their job, for example the heat resistant trousers and suits. As stated by Dave Brown, the third officer in the London fire brigade, the uniform is 'easily identifiable' which is a key factor to help with his role.Likewise in healthcare jobs such as the role of a doctor/nurse their uniform also protects them. Although the use of scrubs provides better protection for both healthcare personnel and patients, the use of gloves and masks create a protection barrier to reduce the spread of infection.

Kate Shaw looks at this in her 'Exploring how nursing uniforms influence self image and professional identity' research report. She comes to the realisation of how the use of the nursing uniform has a mental impact on the workers as well as its physical appearance. She states that the use of these uniforms 'lead to enhanced confidence and, therefore, better performance in clinical practice' because they give the nurses pride in their self image and a feeling of professional identity . Its branding on

uniforms in sports teams benefits both the employer as it is publicity for the brand and the employee as it can give them a sense of belonging.

<u>Sport</u>
Although the utility of uniforms has many positive effects it also has negative effects within society, these negative aspects tend to be seen more in sports as competition is involved. Another ongoing and major negative aspect within sports is the inequality and sexualization of women in sports through uniform. Seen in an article 'The Sexualization Of Women In Sports Extends Even To What They Wear' by Sharon Pruitt Young discusses how 'It's 2021, but the 'policing of female athletes bodies is a practice that continues to thrive'. The national female Norwegian beach handball team refused to wear the typical bikini bottoms and wore shorts after being repeatedly ignored by the sport's governing and were then later fined 150 euros showing the inequality female athletes face due to the use of uniforms.

Conclusion -
In conclusion to this essay I hope the reader can get a clear understanding from the points made that there is a utility of uniforms within society from being used in the sports world to the workforce . However it was important to demonstrate the pros and cons of them, using up to date and historical evidence to have a compare and contrast for the viewer to make up their own opinion. It is evident that society has a huge influence in the usability of uniforms , when comparing and contrasting a more conservative era (mid 1900's) to a more accepting era (the early 2000s).Uniforms are such a vital aspect in our daily lives as seen from this essay. They hold such power for groups/roles but can aslo be so discriminating to others as seen from my research. The use of Uniforms to identify certain groups e.g catholic plaid skirts and jumpers can also suppress expression of an individual's culture and individuality.
Although , the word uniform indicates uniformity and this can be seen as a very beneficial way to reduce social/class segregation and religious segregation also.

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