



'The prison of the body': school uniforms between discipline and governmentality

Jasper Friedrich & Rachel Shanks

To cite this article: Jasper Friedrich & Rachel Shanks (2023) 'The prison of the body': school uniforms between discipline and governmentality, *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 44:1, 16-29, DOI: [10.1080/01596306.2021.1931813](https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2021.1931813)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/01596306.2021.1931813>



© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group



Published online: 06 Jun 2021.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 10976



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)

'The prison of the body': school uniforms between discipline and governmentality

Jasper Friedrich ^a and Rachel Shanks ^b

^aIndependent researcher; ^bSchool of Education, University of Aberdeen, Aberdeen, Scotland

ABSTRACT

This article asks what uniform practices in schools can tell us about how power functions through a comprehensive analysis of the uniform policies of all Scottish state secondary schools ($n = 357$). Against the backdrop of large-scale shifts from disciplinary societies to ones dominated by 'neoliberal governmentality' identified by Foucault and others, we investigate how these modes of power seem to be entangled in school uniform policies. The analysis reveals the specification of detailed uniform policies that both homogenise, divide and hierarchise the school body, suggesting that disciplinary techniques are alive and well. However, in the justifications that schools provide, we see uniform policies framed not as a tool to enforce discipline, but rather as a technique for pupils to fashion themselves into respectable and employable future adults. We suggest the rise of a 'neoliberal governmentality' has shaped how schools justify their practices of control more than it has shaped the practices themselves.

KEYWORDS

School uniform policies;
school dress codes;
discipline; governmentality;
Foucault; content coding
analysis

Introduction

The topic of school uniforms frequently leads to public debate in the United Kingdom. Recurring themes include the affordability of uniforms for families living in poverty, children's right to choose what they wear, and anxieties about lax compliance with, or enforcement of, dress codes which is thought to correlate with a general erosion of discipline and traditional morality among today's young. Most recently, coronavirus-related news stories have highlighted some of the different discourses around uniformed pupils. On the one hand, there is the story of the 'UK's toughest head' recommending that home-schooling parents deal with 'challenging' children by enforcing discipline and dress code (Tweedy, 2020). On the other hand, children were reported to voluntarily don their uniforms to feel 'more connected' to their school community under lockdown (BBC News, 2020) with some schools in Scotland performing #uniformday on Twitter on 15 May 2020. Finally, there are renewed fears about how those financially hit by the pandemic will be able to afford dressing their children once schools reopen (Morrison, 2020).

CONTACT Rachel Shanks  r.k.shanks@abdn.ac.uk

© 2021 The Author(s). Published by Informa UK Limited, trading as Taylor & Francis Group
This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-NoDerivatives License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/>), which permits non-commercial re-use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited, and is not altered, transformed, or built upon in any way.

While pupils, parents and headteachers have joined these debates, academic interest has so far been relatively limited in the UK. There are several ways, however, in which research into school uniforms could provide important insights. For one thing, our knowledge of the impact of different dress codes on educational attainment is both negligible and inconclusive. Further, from a social justice perspective, there is a need for research on the impact of dress codes on children and families in relation to poverty, gender normativity, religious freedom, disability and more. This article looks at school uniforms from a third, somewhat different perspective, however, and asks what uniform practices can tell us about how power functions in today's schools. Among other things, the 'importance of considering uniforms is', as Dussel (2004) puts it, 'that the paradoxes they encompass help to illustrate the complex workings of power in contemporary societies' (p. 105). To elucidate how these paradoxes play out in today's UK school system, and specifically in Scotland, we draw on a comprehensive analysis of the school uniform policies of all Scottish state secondary schools ($n = 357$). We use the term 'school uniform policy' for compulsory uniform requirements, and 'dress codes' as an umbrella term covering both compulsory uniforms and more general guidance on what to wear at schools without compulsory uniforms.

The conceptualisation of power we employ is one associated with Michel Foucault. Power is seen not narrowly as only restricting the free actions of others, but broadly as any 'conduct of conduct'; that is, power as shaping and producing action, rather than merely limiting it. As such political power does not inhere only or mainly in the state's executive or repressive apparatuses, but also, and especially, in networks of 'agencies and techniques, some of which are only loosely associated with the executives and bureaucracies of the formal organs of the state' (Miller & Rose, 2008, p. 26). Schools are of course among the key institutions where power is enacted through techniques, such as dress codes. Uniforms historically formed part of the techniques of disciplinary power, which Foucault saw as emerging in the early modern period: a form of power concerned with imposing strict rules of behaviour and classifying, hierarchising and surveilling people to that end. This form of power, however, as Foucault and others have remarked, no longer seems to be dominant in our society, but has been complemented and possibly superseded by what Foucault terms *governmentality*.¹ Specifically, Foucault identified, back in 1978, what he saw as an emerging neoliberal form of governmentality: a mode of government that relies on and exploits notions of individual freedom and self-expression and, on the surface, seems antithetical to the imposition of strict dress codes. Nevertheless, school uniforms remain ubiquitous across the UK and have seen a rise in popularity in places such as the US and Australia.

We investigate school uniform policies, then, as a key disciplinary technique that has survived these broad shifts in the functioning of power and look at what they can tell us about the complexities of power today. The analysis of the policies reveals that the specification of detailed dress codes homogenise, divide and hierarchise the school body, in all but a few cases. This suggests that disciplinary techniques are still alive and well. However, in the justifications schools offer for these uniform policies, we see dress codes framed not as a tool to enforce discipline, but rather as a technique for pupils to fashion themselves into respectable and employable future adults – incipient entrepreneurs of the self. We suggest, then, that the rise of a 'neoliberal governmentality' has

shaped how schools must justify their practices of control more than it has shaped these practices themselves.

Literature review

Despite the fact that the tradition of school uniforms is thought to originate in the UK (Brunsma, 2004), most research on contemporary uniform practice and policy comes from Australia (e.g. Meadmore & Symes, 1996, 1997; Symes & Meadmore, 1996), Canada (e.g. Pomerantz, 2007; Raby, 2005, 2010) and the US (e.g. Brunsma, 2004; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998; Crockett & Wallendorf, 1998). This can be partially ascribed to the sudden 'renaissance' of the school uniform in the latter countries throughout the 1990s (Brunsma, 2004; Meadmore & Symes, 1996), which sparked debates around the topic. The fact that uniforms have been a more or less constant presence in the history of UK schooling (Stephenson, 2016) perhaps explains the lack of academic attention, but makes it no less relevant to explore the functioning of school dress in the UK – and Scottish – context. As we shall see, many of the issues raised by researchers from North America and Australia are reflected in Scottish school uniform policies.

Among the reasons cited for the (newfound) popularity of the school uniform, the most common are student safety and security, egalitarianism and strengthening of discipline and moral values – all of which are hoped to improve educational attainment. Safety and security are factors mentioned primarily in the US context, where the School Uniform Movement of the 1990s largely formed in response to anxieties about gangs and violence (Brunsma, 2004; Caruso, 1996). The idea that uniforms function to 'level the playing field between the haves and have-nots' (Caruso, 1996, p. 83) is a common theme across national contexts and connects to worries about the growing influence of fashion marketing and 'pressures of competitive dressing' (Bodine, 2003, p. 60). Finally, the wearing of uniforms is thought by some to 'induce positive social beliefs, like respect for law and order' (Meadmore & Symes, 1996, p. 218) – often articulated as a return to an imagined golden age of morality and order: 'School uniforms can *bring back* a little bit more respect for teachers and students in the classroom' (Walmsley, 2011, p. 66, *emphasis added*). Evidence of the effectiveness of uniform policies in achieving such goals is rather mixed (Brunsma, 2004; Brunsma & Rockquemore, 1998; Gentile & Imberman, 2011; Wade & Stafford, 2003).

Other scholars have approached dress codes and uniform policies from a more critical perspective interrogating how they function as a tool of power. In stark contrast to the argument that uniforms 'level the playing field', these authors argue that schools' dress codes are not neutral in regard to gender, race, or class. Dress codes tend to reproduce binary, heteronormative gender roles with different rules for girls and boys and no consideration of non-binary identities (Edwards & Marshall, 2020, p. 742; Happel, 2013), and dress codes tend to place special emphasis on regulating girls and their bodies (Pomerantz, 2007; Raby, 2010). These gender expectations interact with issues of race and ethnicity as white gender norms are usually taken for granted; Morris (2005), for example, describes how African American girls are constantly accused of not dressing 'lady-like' (p. 34). Ethnic minority males, on the other hand, are often targeted through discourses of safety and civility that sees their style of dress as threatening and potentially part of dangerous 'gang' culture (Bodine, 2003, p. 50; Morris, 2005). In relation to class, too,

mere sameness of dress is far from implying a level playing field. Apart from the fact that uniforms may be prohibitively expensive for some families (Ridge, 2006) and that visible differences persist among those wearing new/used and expensive/cheap versions of the school dress, Raby (2005) argues that dress codes are not class-neutral, but embody 'middle-class morality' in their visual resemblance to white collar office wear and vague references to 'good taste' and 'socially acceptable' dress (pp. 79–80).

Many scholars have found it useful to turn to the work of Michel Foucault to analyse school uniforms as technologies of power – they represent, after all, the intersection between two focal points of the French philosopher's work: bodies and social institutions. The wearing of uniforms, in schools and elsewhere, is most straightforwardly related to Foucault's theorisation of disciplinary power and panopticism (Foucault, 1995; Symes & Meadmore, 1996). In prisons and schools alike, uniforms form part of a detailed regime of regulations that specifies subjects' expected behaviour and dress and 'teaches a general sense of discipline imposed by authority' (McVeigh, 1997, p. 201). Uniforms also make the subject visible and amenable to surveillance as they 'announce information about an individual's school, gender, grade, division' (p. 201) and mark their wearers as 'subjects of administration' (Symes & Meadmore, 1996, p. 176). Meadmore and Symes (1996), however, in their genealogical investigation of Australian school uniforms, point to an evolution in the discourse surrounding this technology of power. Historically a tool to 'broaden the reach and extensiveness of the disciplinary society', much contemporary uniform discourse is better understood through Foucault's later concept of *governmentality* (p. 210). This means a move beyond strict enforcement of discipline and sanctions towards tactics that 'seek actively to produce subjects of a certain form, to mould, shape, and organise the psyche, to fabricate individuals with particular desires and aspirations' (Rose, 1988, p. 196). If disciplinary power is about making the uniformed subject visible and amenable to external control, governmental management aims to make subjects internalise this control using dress codes as 'technologies of the body that shape children's perceptions of themselves and of others in particular ways' (Dussel, 2004, p. 102).

These two forms of power are, of course, not mutually exclusive, but tend to coexist in different configurations. Authors have focused on the entanglement of the logics of discipline and government in uniform practices both historically/ genealogically (Dussel, 2004; Meadmore & Symes, 1996) and in a contemporary context (Raby, 2005). The goal of the present paper is, on the one hand, to contribute to our understanding of this entanglement by applying the insights of previous studies to our Scottish case study, but, on the other hand, also to provide a more principled analytical *disentanglement* of these logics. To this end, it is fitting to briefly introduce how Foucault conceptualised the distinction between governmentality and disciplinary power in his 1977–79 lectures at the Collège de France – this lecture series, published in English only in 2007 and 2008, constitute by far Foucault's most principled conceptualisation of governmentality and how it differs from discipline. To our knowledge, no studies have yet drawn on these more detailed insights to research school uniforms.

From disciplinary power to governmental management

Foucault's writings on power never constituted one unified theory. Indeed, one of the lessons of his work is that power is constantly changing, manifesting in a diversity of

ways, and for Foucault it was always more interesting to track the changes and diversity than to pin down the essence of power. As a result, his considerable research output presents us with shifting, perhaps at times contradictory, articulations of the relationships between sovereignty, discipline, governmentality, biopower, pastoral power and security. For our purposes, we find formulation of the distinction between sovereignty, disciplinary power and governmentality outlined in his 1977–79 lectures particularly useful, and therefore focus narrowly on these texts instead of involving Foucault's entire oeuvre.

The concept of disciplinary power was developed, most notably in *Discipline and Punish* (1995), as a challenge to common understandings of power as the exercise of sovereignty. While sovereignty, understood as the more or less arbitrary and violent imposition of the sovereign's will, may at certain moments in history have been the main form of power exercised by heads of state, the modern age brought with it more subtle, 'disciplinary' techniques of power. Modern prisons, for instance, are not concerned merely with punishing and locking away criminals, but rather with reforming them, 'normalising' their behaviour through the use of surveillance and strict discipline. Order is then achieved not through the threat of violence alone, but through detailed control over bodies and behaviours; discipline 'analyzes and breaks down; it breaks down individuals, places, time, movements, actions and operations' (Foucault, 2007, p. 56). Schools were among the institutions Foucault had in mind as key centres where discipline is administered: 'testing, examining, profiling, and streaming in education ... are all examples of such "dividing practices"' (Ball, 1990a, p. 4).² Pupils' time, movements and behaviours are tightly controlled through timetables and detailed codes for behaviour – and dress (Foucault, 1995, pp. 186–187). The uniform in this context is both another way of prescribing and micromanaging the behaviour of children, and a tool of surveillance in that it renders students recognisable as objects of control and often divides them, renders them 'readable' by age, level or certain privileges (Dussel, 2004, p. 91; Foucault, 2007, p. 57; Symes & Meadmore, 1996).

By the time of his 1978 lectures, Foucault (2007) had reached the conclusion that discipline was no longer the defining form that power took on the eve of neoliberal restructuring. It had been eclipsed by what he called 'governmentality', a 'very specific, albeit very complex, power that has the population as its target, [and] political economy as its major form of knowledge' (p. 108).³ While discipline is a technique for governing *individuals*, governmentality, then, deals with entire populations at once. While discipline requires the surveillance of each individual to ensure their compliance with defined norms and 'allows nothing to escape' (p. 45), governmentality requires knowledge about populations as a whole, governing averages and allowing for fluctuations. Instead of defining the optimal behaviour for individuals and then enforcing it, governmentality involves studying the actual behaviour of populations via the tools of statistics, political economy and psychology to reveal how best to manage people in order to achieve specific aims (Foucault, 2008, p. 17). The aim is 'to manage and no longer to control' (Foucault, 2007, p. 353). The specific form of management Foucault identified in the emerging neoliberal thought was turning subjects into self-contained enterprises. Rather than controlling individual behaviour, neoliberal governmentality aims to create the conditions under which individuals will 'freely' contribute their 'human capital' in a maximally profitable way. These conditions are the rule of the market: government 'has to intervene in society so that competitive mechanisms can play a regulatory role at

every moment and every point in society' (Foucault, 2008, p. 145). The worker, or the pupil as future worker or entrepreneur, is no longer an object to be controlled, but 'an active economic subject' engaging in market competition and responsible for maximising their own human capital and investing it for profit (p. 223).

The marketisation and managerialization of the education sector is an especially clear example of these transmutations of power (Ball, 1990b; Fairclough, 1993). Traditionally authoritative institutions that enforced a certain discipline on its students in the name of a higher ideal, such as truth, universities and schools have now become providers of a service which individuals invest in to maximise their own 'employability'. However, as Foucault well recognised, and as our analysis below will make clear, disciplinary and governmental forms of power are not mutually exclusive and in practice always coexist, with one form or another being more or less dominant. As Deutscher (2017) has argued, Foucault's critique of different forms of power should be understood as a 'cumulative' critique, and he highlights how different 'techniques and segments come to be redeployed in different modes of power' (p. 217). School uniform policies provide a fascinating site to study such redeployment and entanglement. We find that much of the traditional rhetoric of discipline, control and surveillance of students is still prominent in Scottish secondary schools' justifications for requiring uniforms. However, this exists side by side with other discourses that highlight students' own interest in and desire for presenting themselves 'professionally' as an investment in their own human capital.

Method

The authors were part of a research team that collected the school uniform and/or dress code policies for every state secondary school in Scotland ($n = 357$) from the school, or if necessary, the local authority, website. It is a legal requirement for schools in Scotland to produce a school handbook for parents. However, the legislation does not specify that the handbook must be accessible online.⁴

The research study was conducted with 12 students who took part in the project while learning how to use the computer assisted qualitative data analysis software NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019). The first-named author was one of the participating students, and the second-named author was the course leader. This study can, therefore, be understood as an authentic undergraduate research experience. The majority of the students had just completed their third year of undergraduate studies and were going on to do their Honours year in the Scottish system.

The initial data collection and analysis was conducted over the space of five days in May 2019. The content coding analysis (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018) began with an emphasis on the reasons that schools gave for school uniform and whether pupils, parents and/or teachers participated in the formation of the uniform policy. Gradually further codes were added as the students read the handbooks and policies and identified new codes, for example the consequences of not following the uniform policy, different uniforms (prefects, summer/winter) and the style of uniform (formal, medium, or informal). Attributes and attribute values were also assigned to each of the schools which were treated as individual cases in NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019). For example, attributes were created to collect information on items of clothing that were banned (hoodies, jeans, leggings, sports jackets, trainers, items with logos, football colours).

In the analysis of the data, queries were conducted in NVivo to discern if there was an explanation for certain coding or attributes, for example if consequences for non-compliance with the school uniform policy were more likely to be included in certain types of school or particular local authorities. To ensure that the coding process was rigorous and trustworthy, coding comparison queries were undertaken between pairs of researchers using the coding comparison query tool in NVivo (Bazeley & Jackson, 2019). The results showed over 90% similarity in coding between each pair of researchers thus showing the reliability of the coding.

Results and discussion

In the following discussion we look at how discourses associated with disciplinary power and governmental management are entangled in the school uniform policies studied. First, we look at the description of the dress code itself and then turn to the justifications for applying the policy.

The form of the uniform

In the way schools specify their dress codes we most clearly see why the vocabulary of disciplinary power is still highly relevant for understanding school uniforms. Nearly all schools include highly specific requirements for uniforms,⁵ including shape and colour of items to be worn, specific items (including jewellery and accessories) which must not be worn, rules on which items are to be worn at certain times and places (e.g. indoors/outdoors) and which pupils are entitled to wear certain special items (e.g. a particular tie).

Table 1 below, reproduced from the school handbook of School 26, shows a fairly representative example of a school's detailed dress code requirements. Children are divided into six distinct categories based on gender and age each of which has its own detailed specifications. Such a dress code, exactly as Foucault saw the function of disciplinary institutions, 'compares, differentiates, hierarchises, homogenises, excludes' (Foucault, 1995, p. 183). The dress code for each category is carefully specified to ensure

Table 1. School uniform specifications reproduced from the school handbook of School 26.

	Boys	Girls
S1 – S4	White shirt with school tie Maroon v-neck knitwear with school logo Smart black trousers Black Shoes/trainers	White shirt with school tie Maroon v-neck knitwear or maroon cardigan with school logo Smart black trousers Black skirt/culottes (to be on or around knee length) Black shoes/trainers
S5	White shirt with school tie Black v-neck knitwear with school logo Smart black trousers Black Shoes/trainers	White shirt with school tie Black v-neck knitwear or black cardigan with school logo Smart black trousers Black skirt/culottes (to be on or around knee length) Black shoes/trainers
S6	White shirt with school tie Black blazer with school logo Black v-neck knitwear with school logo Smart black trousers Black Shoes/trainers	White shirt with school tie Black blazer with school logo Black v-neck knitwear or black cardigan with school logo Smart black trousers Black skirt/culottes (to be on or around knee length) Black shoes/trainers

homogeneity, while differentiating boys and girls, hierarchising age groups⁶ and excluding everything that does not conform to this rigid schema (including, any non-traditional gender expressions). The asymmetrical disciplining of gender performance is especially apparent: while girls have more choice (they may choose between trousers or skirts and knitwear or cardigans, while boys are confined to trousers and knitwear), girls face more detailed regulation (the skirt must be around knee length).

Such additional disciplining of girls' dress is pervasive throughout Scottish secondary schools with regulations such as 'blouse/shirt should be able to be buttoned up to the neck' (School 324), 'girls' skirts ... must be a minimum of 20 or 22 inches in length' (School 36) and prohibitions on 'high heels, and excessive jewellery or make-up' (School 142) or 'indecent' and 'tight-fitting' clothing.

The hierarchising function of the uniform is of course present both in that it distinguishes pupils from staff and teachers, as well as in the distinctions made between different age groups – 132 of the 357 schools have different dress codes based on stages. A further hierarchising function is played by the special uniforms which prefects or other students in privileged positions are allowed to wear in some schools. School 124, for instance, specifies that blazers are to be worn by 'all prefects, House captains, and students in leadership positions'.

The way dress codes are specified in the majority of schools, then, is evidence that they still largely play the role of a disciplinary mechanism. Pupils' dress is controlled in detail in a way that homogenises while it also differentiates based on gender, stage and privileges. Uniform policies strictly discipline unwanted gender performances and perform a normalising role in how they present children with a binary distinction between the appropriate dress for boys and girls. In short, the dress codes seem perfectly compatible with what Foucault describes as the point of disciplinary power: 'to increase the useful size of multiplicities by decreasing the inconveniences of the power which, in order to make them useful, must control them' (1995, p. 220). The dress codes make pupils visible and identifiable while trying to control any function dress may otherwise play that distracts from the goal of making good, docile students: clothes which are dangerous, distracting, indecent, or potentially divisive are almost universally banned.

Despite the overwhelming reliance on detailed regulations in the specification of school dress codes, a few schools stand out in having more 'relaxed' policies suggesting a mode of control closer to Foucault's idea of governmentality. School 267, for instance, does not specify an official uniform, 'but children are expected to come to school wearing clean and tidy clothes that are *appropriate for work*' (our emphasis). Likewise, School 158 does not 'insist on pupils having school uniform or specialised clothing', but 'wishes to encourage in pupils habits of tidiness and of cleanliness'. Such loose dress codes, rather than controlling pupils' clothes in detail, make it the pupil's (or parents') own responsibility to meet standards of 'tidiness' and appropriateness for work. This is in line with the idea of the 'self as enterprise' so central to neoliberal governmentality (McNay, 2009).

Clearly, though, such vague terms as 'appropriate' and 'clean' leave nearly everything up to the actual enforcement of such dress codes. Such enforcement itself can be seen as a disciplinary technique, as a way of cementing hierarchies and fixing the student in a subservient position.⁷ However, where enforcement is less focused on the strict imposition of clear rules and more on making students internalise the responsibility to dress

‘respectably’ (some schools offer rewards for the best dressed students, for instance), this may suggest the type of governmental management focused on developing ‘human capital’ which, as we discuss in the next section, is prominent in the justifications for school uniforms.

There are marked differences in the approach to non-compliance with uniform policies across the schools. Twenty-seven schools state that children ‘will never be deprived of any educational benefit as a result of not conforming to the dress code’, of which 16 schools specify ‘in particular, pupils will not be denied access to examinations as a consequence of not conforming to the policy’. However, other schools mention sanctions such as issuing demerits, contacting parents, sending pupils home to change, issuing detention or following their disciplinary procedures.

Justifications

UK school uniforms are thought to have their roots in the English charity schools of the early modern period (Mansfield, 1974; Stephenson, 2016, Ch. 1). They were generally justified as a cost-effective way to provide children with practical clothing that at the same time marked them as inferior subjects of charity and also made them visible and surveillable to schools’ trustees and benefactors (Meadmore & Symes, 1996, p. 212; Stephenson, 2016). Not entirely dissimilar justifications are still offered by some Scottish secondary schools today. A number of schools highlight that uniform use ‘allows staff to tell at a glance who belongs in the school’ (School 76) or ‘makes [pupils] more easily identifiable at a distance or in crowded areas’ (School 234). Making students visible and identifiable is claimed to be necessary both to reduce truancy, but also for reasons of security allowing ‘strangers in the school to be immediately identified’ (School 107) – such justifications must be seen in the context of the growing securitisation of schools with the increase in CCTV installations (Carlile, 2018, p. 23). One of the three advantages that the Scottish Government gives for school uniform is that it makes it easier for staff to identify who belongs to the school (email communication, 17 February 2021). In total, we found that 64 of the schools in our study as justifying their policies, at least in part, by citing the need to reduce truancy or maintain safety and security.

More common, however, are justifications which construe the uniform not as a mode of disciplinary control, but rather one of governmental management. Instead of a tool of subjection and surveillance, dress codes are often portrayed as a tool to shape pupils into self-confident and responsible citizens more likely to succeed as enterprising selves in a competitive job market. The most commonly cited reason for uniforms in our coding (91 schools) has to do with encouraging identification with and pride in the school, or, in the words of School 9’s uniform policy, to give ‘pupils a sense of belonging to the school “team”’. In this way, the school uniform is justified not as a convenient tool of administration, but rather as a part of an attractive ‘product’ offered by the school to the parents (or the pupils themselves?) of shaping children into resourceful individuals. (In this regard, an interesting question that emerges is how such marketized discourse might affect the relations between teachers, pupils and parents: if parents or pupils are being sold an attractive ‘product’, what expectations might *they* have for how *teachers* should be dressed, for instance?). Uniforms are meant to enhance pupils’ ‘respect for

themselves' (School 185) and 'instil a pride in the school and *contribute to its value*' (School 23, emphasis ours).

Many schools explicitly justify the wearing of uniforms by claiming that it, in effect, adds to pupils' 'human capital' and is in their interest as future competitors on the job market. A commonly cited reason is that neatly dressed pupils enhance the reputation of the school, and 'the reputation of the school is liable to have some impact on [pupils'] life after leaving' (School 34). Further, a number of schools make claims to the effect that the uniform 'introduces young people at an early age to the concept of dressing for work' (School 275) or prepares them to 'dress appropriately for ... certain work requirements, interviews' (School 345). The purpose of the school's dress code, then, seems to be to assist pupils in becoming successful future 'enterprising selves' and take responsibility for their own 'professional appearance' – in total, 55 of the schools studies gave reasons which we coded for 'employability'. Here it is important to note, as Raby (2005) also does, that school uniforms are reminiscent of the typical work dress of white-collar office workers and thereby can be seen to shape not just students' sense of responsibility for looking employable, but also their idea of which kind of jobs are worth striving for.

Contrary, then, to the image of uniforms as a tool of discipline and efficient administration, schools justify their dress codes overwhelmingly in language that emphasises the pupils' own interest in taking responsibility for their image and the image of the school. This is further underscored by the fact that a very large number of schools (152) explicitly mention pupils' participation in or support for dress policies. While meaningful pupil participation would be a welcome step, in reality children's input, where this was specified in the documents analysed, was confined to voting on a limited number of pre-defined versions of the school's uniform. Such 'participation' can thus be seen as a further way of making pupils responsible for their own appearance in school, and it is telling that many schools claim that their student population prefers more formal and rigid dress codes. One school writes, for instance, that pupils 'appreciate that if they were in employment there would most likely be a dress code' (school 20), thus suggesting that students have internalised the idea that dress codes are there to prepare them for 'employability' (though such claims on the school's part naturally cannot be taken at face value).

Conclusion

Dussel (2004) provided a useful analysis of how disciplinary power and governmental management are entangled in the practice of school uniforms in a way that reveals much about the 'complex workings of power' in our society today (p. 105). In this regard, she cites Foucault:

Governing people, ... is not a way to force people to do what the governor wants; it is always a versatile equilibrium, with complementarity and conflicts between techniques which impose coercion and processes through which the self is constructed or modified by himself. (Foucault, 1997, p. 154)

The present study has been an attempt to investigate the details of how that 'versatile equilibrium' looks in the context of contemporary Scottish secondary schools' uniform

policies. Drawing on the complete dataset of the dress code policies of all 357 state secondary schools in Scotland, we identified discourses of disciplinary power and governmentality in relation to the specification and justification of school uniforms. While the dress codes themselves, with few exceptions, take the form of strict, detailed regulations that homogenise and hierarchise the student body in disciplinary fashion, they are largely justified in terms of how they supposedly shape pupils' perceptions of themselves as members of the school community and future employees. While our study does not incorporate a historical perspective, we can speculate that this is the result of marketisation of the public sector, which forces educational institutions to justify their practices in terms of value added to the 'enterprise society'. This in turn tells us something about what happens when local practices of control, such as the imposition of school uniforms, interact with larger-scale shifts in how power operates in society. In the context of Scottish school uniform policies, we would suggest that the advent of the neoliberal governmentality described by Foucault has had a much stronger effect on how practices of control are justified, than how they operate in practice. However, it is of course likely that the justifications offered then go on to shape the practices of school uniforms as might be the case in those few schools which simply encourage 'appropriate' dress instead of imposing a specific uniform.

Finally, it is important to stress that we have, in this article, focused on school uniform policies in the form of written documents, and not studied how these dress codes are enforced, resisted or negotiated in practice. These documents are important sources of data both because they constitute authoritative and explicit statements of rules and norms to which actors are supposed to refer in their practice, and because they allow us to compare a very large number of schools. It is important not to assume, however, that the content of these written policies are always translated into practice without friction – indeed, as Doherty (2007) puts it, the lens of Foucauldian governmentality should always be applied with 'an insatiable concern for the resistance, subversion, penetration, failures and conflicts of operationalised policy' (p. 201). It would thus be a particularly interesting avenue for further research to investigate how the changing discourses around school dress as a way of shaping students' human capital and employability shape actual enforcement and possibilities for resistance and counter-conduct in schools.

Notes

1. One may of course ask whether techniques of government have really superseded disciplinary techniques, or rather been added to the latter in a way that reinforces them. In any case, Foucault was keen to stress how different techniques of power are entangled with each other and become redeployed in new contexts (Deutscher, 2017); our aim in this article is to better understand how this entanglement plays out 'on the ground'. We thank an anonymous reviewer for raising this point.
2. To this we should add physical education, historically closely linked with the militarisation of schools, as another potential technique 'concerned with disciplining children by working primarily on their bodies' (Kirk & Spiller, 1994, p. 78). PE has played an important role in the history of school uniforms, many components of which have their origin in sporting regalia (Meadmore & Symes, 1996, p. 213).
3. The quote continues: '... and apparatuses of security as its essential technical instrument'. This refers to a highly specific notion of security which Foucault develops in the first lectures of the 1977–1978 series, and then abandons for the rest of the course. We here omit any

discussion of this concept of security, which Foucault himself seemed to lose interest in as his thoughts on governmentality matured.

4. For a detailed summary of the characteristics of the schools please see <https://www2.gov.scot/Topics/Statistics/Browse/School-Education/Datasets/contactdetails>
5. Out of the 357 schools studied, 241 required what me might term a 'formal' school uniform that included both blazer and tie and a further 133 required at least either blazer or tie. Only 40 schools had more relaxed dress codes which typically specified acceptable colours for sweatshirt or jumpers and sometimes included requirements to display the school badge.
6. While the differences in dress for different stages may not strike us as a form of disciplinary control in the way gender differences do, for Foucault, the very idea of dividing pupils into stages which they will move through successively was central to the development of disciplinary techniques in schools (1995, p. 165). The idea of distributing pupils spatially and distinguishing them visually based on their stage is arguably a key feature of disciplinary control.
7. Thanks to the anonymous reviewer who made this point to us.

Acknowledgements

We wish to thank the students who were involved in the original sourcing and coding of school uniform policies, namely Lucas Adrian Brauns, Agata Kostrzewa, Marton Kottmayer, Kirsten Phelps, Daniel Phillips, Vilma Pullinen, Atyrah Hanim Razali, Cameron Roy, Maria Steiner Simonsen, and particularly Annabelle Eveline Olsson who provided feedback on this work. We also wish to thank Prof Pamela Abbott for her insightful comments on an early draft of the manuscript.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author(s).

ORCID

Rachel Shanks  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-7895-5136>

Jasper Friedrich  <http://orcid.org/0000-0002-1842-9011>

References

- Ball, S. J. (1990a). Introducing monsieur foucault. In S. J. Ball (Ed.), *Foucault and education: Disciplines and knowledge* (pp. 1–8). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Ball, S. J. (1990b). Management as a moral technology: A Luddite analysis. In S. J. Ball (Ed.), *Foucault and education: Disciplines and knowledge* (pp. 153–166). Abingdon: Routledge.
- Bazeley, P., & Jackson, K. (2019). *Qualitative data analysis with NVivo* (3rd ed.). London: SAGE.
- BBC News. (2020). Coronavirus: The home school pupils putting on their uniforms. Retrieved from <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-scotland-52674879>
- Bodine, A. (2003). School uniforms and discourses on childhood. *Childhood*, 10(1), 43–63.
- Brunsma, D. L. (2004). *The school uniform movement and what it tells us about American education: A symbolic crusade*. Lanham, MD: ScarecrowEducation.
- Brunsma, D. L., & Rockquemore, K. A. (1998). Effects of student uniforms on attendance, behavior problems, substance use, and academic achievement. *The Journal of Educational Research*, 92(1), 53–62.
- Carlile, A. (2018). School surveillance, control, and resistance in the United Kingdom. In J. Deakin, E. Taylor, & A. Kupchik (Eds.), *The Palgrave international handbook of school discipline, surveillance, and social control* (pp. 17–42). Cham: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Caruso, P. (1996). Individuality vs conformity: The issue behind school uniforms. *NASSP Bulletin*, 80(581), 83–88.

- Cohen, L., Manion, L., & Morrison, K. (2018). *Research methods in education* (8th ed.). New York, NY: Routledge.
- Crockett, D., & Wallendorf, M. (1998). Sociological perspective on imposed school dress codes: Consumption as attempted suppression of class and group symbolism. *Journal of Macromarketing*, 18(2), 115–131.
- Deutscher, P. (2017). 'Post-Foucault': The critical time of the present. In P. Deutscher & C. Lafont (Eds.), *Critical theory in critical times: Transforming the global political and economic order* (pp. 207–232). New York, NY: Columbia University Press.
- Doherty, R. (2007). Critically framing education policy: Foucault, discourse and governmentality. In M. A. Peters & T. Besley (Eds.), *Why Foucault? New directions in educational research* (pp. 193–204). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Dussel, I. (2004). Fashioning the schooled self through uniforms: A Foucauldian approach to contemporary school policies. In B. M. Baker & K. E. Heyning (Eds.), *Dangerous coagulations: The uses of Foucault in the study of education* (pp. 85–116). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Edwards, T. K., & Marshall, C. (2020). Undressing policy: A critical analysis of North Carolina (USA) public school dress codes. *Gender and Education*, 32(6), 732–750.
- Fairclough, N. (1993). Critical discourse analysis and the marketization of public discourse: The universities. *Discourse & Society*, 4(2), 133–168.
- Foucault, M. (1995). *Discipline and punish: The birth of the prison* (2nd ed.). London: Vintage Books.
- Foucault, M. (1997). *The politics of truth* (S. Lotringer, ed.). Cambridge, MA: Semiotext(e).
- Foucault, M. (2007). *Security, territory, population: Lectures at the College de France, 1977–78* (M. Senellart, ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Foucault, M. (2008). *The birth of biopolitics: Lectures at the College de France, 1978–79* (M. Senellart, ed.). Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Gentile, E., & Imberman, S. A. (2011). Dressed for success? The effect of school uniforms on student achievement and behavior. *NBER Working Paper Series*, 17337. Retrieved from <http://www.nber.org/papers/w17337>
- Happel, A. (2013). Ritualized girling: School uniforms and the compulsory performance of gender. *Journal of Gender Studies*, 22(1), 92–96.
- Kirk, D., & Spiller, B. (1994). Schooling the docile body: Physical education, schooling and the myth of oppression. *Australian Journal of Education*, 38(1), 78–95.
- Mansfield, A. (1974). Dress of the English schoolchild. *Costume*, 8(1), 56–60.
- McNay, L. (2009). Self as enterprise: Dilemmas of control and resistance in Foucault's. *The Birth of Biopolitics. Theory, Culture & Society*, 26(6), 55–77.
- McVeigh, B. (1997). Wearing ideology: How uniforms discipline minds and bodies in Japan. *Fashion Theory*, 1(2), 189–213.
- Meadmore, D., & Symes, C. (1996). Of uniform appearance: A symbol of school discipline and governmentality. *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, 17(2), 209–225.
- Meadmore, D., & Symes, C. (1997). Keeping up appearances: Uniform policy for school diversity? *British Journal of Educational Studies*, 45(2), 174–186.
- Miller, P., & Rose, N. (2008). *Governing the present: Administering economic, social and personal life*. Cambridge: Polity Press.
- Morris, E. W. (2005). 'Tuck in that shirt!': Race, class, gender and discipline in an urban school. *Sociological Perspectives*, 48(1), 25–48.
- Morrison, H. (2020). Uniforms for pupils sought amid coronavirus economic fears. *Glasgow Times*. Retrieved from <https://www.glasgowtimes.co.uk/news/18370952.uniforms-pupils-sought-amid-coronavirus-economic-fears/>
- Pomerantz, S. (2007). Cleavage in a tank top: Bodily prohibition and the discourses of school dress codes. *Alberta Journal of Educational Research*, 53(4), 373–386.
- Raby, R. (2005). Polite, well-dressed and on time: Secondary school conduct codes and the production of docile citizens. *Canadian Review of Sociology*, 42(1), 71–91.
- Raby, R. (2010). 'Tank tops are Ok but I don't want to see her thong': Girls' engagements with secondary school dress codes. *Youth & Society*, 41(3), 333–356.

- Ridge, T. (2006). Childhood poverty: A barrier to social participation and inclusion. In E. K. M. Tisdall, J. M. Davis, A. Prout, & M. Hill (Eds.), *Children, young people and social inclusion: Participation for what?* (pp. 23–38). Bristol: Policy Press.
- Rose, N. (1988). Calculable minds and manageable individuals. *History of the Human Sciences*, 1(2), 179–200.
- Stephenson, K. (2016). 'It's not for the sake of a ribboned coat': A history of British school uniform. [Doctoral dissertation, University of York]. White Rose eTheses Online. Retrieved from <http://etheses.whiterose.ac.uk/12647/1/PhD%20WHOLE.pdf>
- Symes, C., & Meadmore, D. (1996). Force of habit: The school uniform as a body of knowledge. In E. McWilliam & P. G. Taylor (Eds.), *Pedagogy, technology, and the body* (pp. 171–191). New York, NY: Peter Lang.
- Tweedy, J. (2020). Superhead says locked-down children should wear their school uniform at HOME to 'mentally prepare' for schoolwork – and parents could even write up a contract outlining what's required. *Daily Mail Online*. Retrieved from <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-8151673/Superhead-says-locked-children-wear-school-uniform-HOME>
- Wade, K. K., & Stafford, M. E. (2003). Public school uniforms: Effect on perceptions of gang presence, school climate, and student self-perceptions. *Education and Urban Society*, 35(4), 399–420.
- Walmsley, A. (2011). What the United Kingdom can teach the United States about school uniforms. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 92(6), 63–66.