



**Symbolic Clothing in  
Schools: What Should Be  
Worn and Why  
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pages)  
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**Book Review**  
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Aiming to criticize sorts of sometimes covert and oftentimes overt differences among Canada, France, the U.K. and the U.S., *Symbolic Clothing in Schools* is unequivocally the voice of social justice when it comes to symbolic clothing in schools. A strong advocate of symbolic clothing in schools, the author attempts to equate clothing to one's identity in ways that promote one's personal and cultural identity. This book is more than an extraordinary work of clothing symbolism. It is an unapologetic call for any community to accept clothing a symbol of one's identity. Moreover, it embraces a perspective that goes beyond religion, and it encompasses various political and social dimensions.

The book starts with a mere introduction to symbolic clothing. It is an introduction to what constitutes symbolic clothing. It sets the scene about why symbolic clothing has become an issue around the globe. It explains the extent of the problem, and it presents numerous examples explaining how the issue has evolved from one country to another. To many, clothing may be a personal endeavor that may take different relevant meanings, whether that is religious, political or social. This section also lays out the groundwork for most common issues delineated in the following chapters.

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Chapter one delineates the reasons why symbolic clothing is discouraged and often prohibited. The chapter focuses on four main reasons why schools boards and policymakers opt-in to restrict symbolic clothing. More importantly, however, the author narrowly focuses on the problematic issues generated by the prohibition of symbolic clothing. The depth and the breadth of the examples provided are a clear indication that these reasons may not necessarily accomplish what policymakers intended.

Chapter Two analyzes symbolic clothing in France. Chapter two starts with a historical review of the separation of state and the church. Even subtle differences are brought to the fore in the form of a systemic analysis. The chapter follows with the issues of *hijab* in the Muslim community and leads up to the national debate in France regarding *hijab*'s initial large acceptance in 1980s until its formal national prohibition in 2004. The chapter continues with an examination of the French society by questioning three fundamental characteristics of a French pluralist society: 1) whether state's decision to ban religious symbols in effort to promote children's autonomy is justified, 2) whether parents should exercise their right to raise their children in a particular way, and 3) whether a child's exposure to different life perspectives fundamentally influences that child's autonomy. The answer is not simple, hence, in an attempt to answer these questions, the author seeks to define French secular neutrality, and what the French way of life mean. With this consideration in mind, the author closes the French argument by questioning whether or not the French government's actions are fully justified and fundamentally effective for its intended purposes.

Chapter Three targets free speech in the United States. More specifically, it seeks to explain the pertinence of freedom of speech in students' lives and to what extend the boundaries are largely accepted in communities and upheld in courtrooms. The chapter begins contrasting a fundamental difference between France and the United States. While the debate in France focuses largely on banning of religious clothing and promoting secularism, the United States focuses on political and social symbolic clothing. According to the author, even though there is a constitutional duty to separate state and church, the influence of religions, particularly Christianity, is greatly heightened. Five court cases presented in the chapter portray a swinging pendulum of what constitutes free speech in the United States. Nevertheless, the common thread among these five court cases reveals that offensive or potentially offensive parameters are attributed to the discretion of school's board. Generally speaking, political and social dimensions, rather than religious perspectives as is the case in France, seem to be of particular concern.

Chapter Four examines Sikh Daggers in the Canadian schools. In difference with France and the United States, Canada is presented as taking a different stance on symbolic clothing. Unlike France and the United States, the Canadian court almost always focuses on resolving cases on basis of "reasonable accommodations." The case of Multani sent a wave of what constitutes "reasonable accommodation" and how close to one's cultural identity "reasonable accommodation" must be to have legal considerations. Just like in Chapter One, the author focuses on defining what it means to be "Canadian" and what the "Canadian Way" is. The chapter then moves to present Canadian court judgments regarding fundamental rights in Canada. While doing so, the public perceptions and attitudes towards Canadian legal system express an overwhelming support for the Charter of Rights and Freedoms under which the

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Multani case was presented. Although the Multani case was not widely welcomed, it did nonetheless set a precedent of constitutional freedom different from France and the United States. However, the author diligently cautions that a mere replication of the Canadian justice system would be a foolish move that misaligns with other forms of governance found in France, the U.S., and/or England.

Chapter Five considers symbolic clothing in England. Unlike France, the United States and Canada, England has repeatedly sent mixed messages regarding symbolic clothing in schools. Needless to say, it is relatively difficult for the Brits to understand what is acceptable and what is rejected in British pluralistic society. Nonetheless, the author commences an analysis by addressing Muslim dresses in schools. In contrast to France's *hijab*, *niqab* has rather come under attention and scrutiny. Because of this issue, the Department of Children, Schools and Families have left it up to school governing boards' discretion in what is acceptable in schools. This sense of different policy applicability has led to stark differences among school boards. One issue with the mixed messages stemming from England is mainly attributed to the lack of a constitution in England. Rather, the House of Lords seems to be the acting body of precedent unless school governance issues guidelines consistent with their beliefs. Because of this incongruence, the author stresses non-transparent practices of school integration among faith groups in various communities.

Chapter Six is an audacious attempt to answer whether or not we should ban symbolic clothing and what is considered oppressive or repressive. For this reason, the author strikes down four main considerations related to symbolic clothing. In addressing whether the symbolic clothing preserves the public sphere, the author holds strong views in which the French legislature has divided instead of uniting various religious groups under an umbrella of collaboration. In addressing whether the clothing is oppressive to one or others, the author finds it difficult to ascertain what is considered appropriate and what is considered offensive. In addressing whether the clothing significantly inhibits the education aims of the school, the author suggest that clothing *may* offend someone is not a justified activity of oppression. And, if there are any doubts, it is the responsibility of the state to demonstrate it. In addressing whether the symbolic clothing is essential to one's identity, the author argues that lack of discussion regarding this issue leads to a loss of opportunity to come to a better understanding of the complexities surrounding major issues in our lives. The chapter concludes with various recommendations with guidelines within reasonable parameters acceptable to schools, including even the use of school uniforms.

Chapter Seven is a conclusion aiming to answer the underlying question of whether fighting symbolic clothing is a fight worth fighting for. Guidelines and the context in which the situation takes place must be paid close attention to. Mere banning of symbolic clothing is nothing more than a consequential adversary of the policy defining only basic boundaries. Generally speaking, the author guides the reader to pay particular attention to context and history that has traditionally directed symbolic clothing mannerism.

The vast amount of work the author dedicated to this work is immensely helpful not only to seasoned readers but with some degree of difficulty even to the novice audiences. The book is extremely informative in revealing the context and the applicability of cases in each country. It

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conveys a meaningful experiential learning atmosphere for the readers in what matters most in examining symbolic clothing in schools: context of what the relevance of symbolic clothing is. The text leads the audience with a logical construction of substantiated arguments. It presents comparative education in similar terms and context without losing the essence of the base. This book is by no means an introduction to comparative education, and particularly symbolic clothing in schools. But yet, even the more shrewd readers will appreciate what the author has accomplished in this literary work: that of comparing contexts of similar values among and between France, the United States, Canada and England.