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I declare that this **Critical Cultures Research Project** is all my own work and that all sources have been fully acknowledged.

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Introduction

I was emboldened by the women in my family to learn needlework from very early in my life. At the age of seven or eight I learned to knit and sew.

Conversely, I was encouraged to engage in hands-on work with my grandfather. He worked with wood, making structures for the house and garden. I had a balanced experience with both typically male and typically female crafts and pastimes.

It seemed that the only limits for my learning were because of my age, not my gender. My balanced experiences as a child have been reflected in my studio work. I am endlessly enthralled by the combination of cold and hard materials with soft warm materials.

Having become interested in the idea of combining hard and soft, I also became aware of the symbolic significance of my materials. Sewing, knitting and textiles are female dominated fields. Metalwork and construction are male dominated fields. And here I found myself somewhere in the middle, wanting to create a unison.

The balance in my education extended to my schooling. I went to a mixed secondary school where we had a variety of subject options. Metalwork, woodwork, technical graphics, home economics, music or art.

It wasn't until recently when I discovered that my balanced experiences were not typical overall, but in Ireland, they can be seen to be particularly unusual. A fact which I came to learn while working as a silver-smithing teacher.

I teach short metal forging workshops in the evenings in Dublin. We get a diverse range of people attending. It has been expressed to me by women in my class that they were incredibly excited to try some metal work. The reason, they say, is that they were ‘not allowed’ to do any metalwork in school. The thread that connected these women was that they had all attended an all-girls secondary school.

I was taken aback. It seemed archaic to me that some sort of gender segregation was occurring regarding subject options. I was aware of sex segregation in schools. Single sex schools are a familiar phenomenon in Ireland. Perhaps naively, I thought that a wide range of subjects would be offered in these schools and that like me, the choice of subjects to study was down to the child.

I, as a young person, was never denied choice based on my gender. I was of the mind that if something as discriminate as this was being practised in modern Ireland, we would be making a change. After all, we were the first country in Europe to legalise gay marriage, and we recently repealed the 8th amendment of our constitution to allow women access to full bodily autonomy. The primary focus of all of these changes was to allow our citizens the freedom of *choice*. The picture of Ireland I had after these particular advances was that of a progressive, socially just Republic. That equality and fairness seems to be a key virtue of Irish people. Are we really denying the children in our schools the *choice* of what to study based on their sex? And if so why?

Review of literature

In this research essay I utilised statistical databases, census, newspaper articles, books, academic papers. As well as this, anecdotal evidence, citizens information, the ERSI and government websites all aided me in my research on this topic.

The prevalence of single sex schools have intrinsic links with the Catholic Church's rights to own and run schools in Ireland as per article 44 of our constitution (Government of Ireland 1937). Through the census information I found that between 2011 and 2016 there has been a 5.9% decrease in the number of people identifying as Catholic. In the same years there has been a 73.6% increase in the number of people ticking 'no religion' on the census. (CSO, 2017) However despite these numbers, Marie Griffin's paper on Catholic schools in Ireland stated that in 2019;

Just over 90% of our primary schools are Catholic, while 50% of our secondary schools are under catholic patronage (Catholic schools in ireland today, 58, 2019)

Athena Analytics found that there is a stark difference in the subjects that are on offer between all boys and all girls schools (2018). Usually with a higher percentage of boys schools offering technological subjects with a staggering 0% of boys schools offering home economics. The effects of this sees women accounting for just 1% of craft apprenticeships in Ireland. (Further and Higher Education, 2022) Movements in recent years have coined the term 'baptism barrier' in reference to school admission preference, leading to the eventual bill 'Admissions to Schools Act', being enacted to curb this power held by Catholic schools. Educate Together schools saw a 53% increase in their numbers across Ireland between 2014 and 2021. (Educate Together, 2021)

In this essay I explore the practice of gender segregation in our school system and examine its roots within its entanglement of the Catholic Church and the Irish state. The first chapter

looks at the inception and history of our school system and its roots in segregation based on gender. In particular, I look at this through the lens of sexism and notions of misogyny. I put this in context as in stark opposition to other advancements we have made towards equality. The second chapter attempts to examine the arguments for and against single sex schools. I present the effects that this practice has had on the citizens of Ireland through statistics and anecdotal evidence. As well as this, I note the changes and hopeful future ahead for our education system.

Chapter 1:

School & Subject Sex Segregation: incongruent with a modern Ireland

“The restricted education offered to girls, at all social levels, reflected society’s attitudes towards a woman’s proper place”

(Maria Luddy, Women in Ireland 1880-1918)

Ireland as a society has some contradictions within its views of equality. Though in many areas we have progressed well ahead of our peers in Europe and the world over. The area around secondary school education has remained stagnant and archaic.

The marriage act of 2015 saw Ireland become the first country *in the world* to legalise same-sex marriage through referendum. (Hilliard and Ó Caollaí, 2015) In 2018 we repealed the eighth amendment of our constitution that held a ban on abortion. The result was an availability of *choice* to the women of Ireland. Equality in Irish law also extends to the workplace; The Equal Status act 2000-2004 protects people from discrimination within

employment based on race, age, religion, sexuality, family status and *gender*. (Government of Ireland, *Equal status act*, 2000)

Its principle is to promote equal treatment of all peoples within our society and says that no one can be treated differently within the workplace based on the above factors. Contradicting it may seem therefore that before a person can gain employment in our egalitarian framework, they must first navigate through an education system that for the most part, allows a person's gender to decide which subjects are available to them in school.

If two genders are to be treated equally in the workplace, why is it that we are so commonly educated separately based on gender? Much more so than our European counterparts, we segregate genders in schools. As of 2019;

‘Just over 90% of our primary schools are Catholic, while 50% of our secondary schools are under catholic patronage’ (Griffin 58, 2019)

One-third of our secondary schools are same-sex, while 17% of children in Ireland attend a single-sex primary school (Healy, 2022). Our nearest neighbour, the UK, has just 6% of its schools sex-segregated. (*School guide*, 2022).

Even more concerning is the fact that the optional subjects on offer in an all girls-school are geared towards the home. With metal work, woodwork, engineering and technical graphics often not even presented as options to young girls in 2023. Vice versa in all-boys secondary schools, it is commonplace that the subject of home economics is omitted from the curriculum.

Many of these amendments that we have made in recent years are symbolic of us cutting ties between the Catholic Church and the Irish State. Two bodies that in the past seemed to be inextricably linked. Even from the very inception of the Irish free state and the writing of our constitution, the Catholic Church has had a hand to play in the way that our society until now

has been run. Though we may in some areas be spearheading a movement towards equality, the foundations that our society rests upon - that is our education system - still is influenced by a practice of gender discrimination and segregation which is incongruent with the many other progressions we have made towards becoming an indiscriminate society.

It's clear that from these advancements, the young generation of Ireland is becoming more tolerant of people and less tolerant of dogmatic religious institutions deciding so many aspects of Irish life. Why is it then that we have failed so far to recognise and to reject the blatant gender discrimination that is occurring in our secondary schools?

It is in this area that the ties with the Catholic Church remain almost fully intact. The Catholic Church helped Ireland to establish a school system in 1831 (Walsh, 2016, p8). One does not need to be well versed in the Catholic church's beliefs to be aware of its historically narrow view on women and girls. What transpired was an uptake of Catholic schools that exclusively taught boys and girls separately, consistent with the teachings of the Bible. Today the Catholic Church is the main provider of education in Ireland, but this hasn't always been the case.

In Ireland during the Penal laws (1695-1829) there were no government funded National schools for Catholics. In fact, Catholics were not afforded the right to an education at all as Catholic schools were completely banned. ('Hedge schools', *TCD*, 2020) When the last of the penal laws were repealed in 1829, this was an incentive for Catholic orders to establish schools for the purpose of preserving their faith and teachings. (Walsh, 2016, p8) The abolition of the penal laws meant that Catholics were now being afforded the right to education when the government of Ireland created its first framework for a national school system. This is where we can see the first attestation of Catholic influence over our education

system. The influence of the Catholic Church in many ways has left misogynistic scars on our country. Morally, women and men were seen to differ so intensely that to educate them equally, let alone in the same building would be seen as unscrupulous to their doctrine.

The first National system of education in Ireland was established in 1831 by Lord Stanley. (Walsh, 2016, p9) This was in essence, a political response of the British Empire to the difficulties of controlling its Irish colony. Its efforts were to socialise the Irish population therefore making us more governable.

In 1831, for the first time, Catholic children in Ireland could attend national schools for free. Previous to this was the existence of hedge schools, which were unregulated illegal schools charging a fee for each child. (Walsh, 2016, p8) In October 1831, Lord Stanley outlined the structure of the new National System in a letter to the Duke of Leinster. The initial goals of the system were to have a non-denominational national school system.

The intention to co-educate all religious denominations in Ireland, with the belief that if we could be educated together as children we could live in peace together as adults, was a progressive thesis that was a huge failure (Walsh 9, 2016).

In this letter, Stanley states that the objective was:

to afford *combined* [original emphasis] literary and moral, and *separate* [original emphasis] religious instruction, to children of all persuasions, as far as possible, in the same school, upon the fundamental principle, that no attempt shall be made to interfere with the peculiar religious tenets of any description of Christian pupils.
(Walsh, 2016, p9-10)

This did not work well in the tense Ireland of the time. All churches objected, the protestant clergy showing the most vehement objection. Fear of proselytism from both Catholics and Protestants undermined the intention of a non-denominational school system. Religious orders had been setting up their own schools in the decades preceding this letter and it was

apparent that a seed of segregation sown during penal laws, was beginning to germinate. The Presentation sisters were established in 1791 in Cork, the Christian Brothers 1802 and the mercy sisters in 1828 (Walsh, 2016, p9). After years of oppression and the existence of illegal and unregulated hedge schools, it would seem that religious orders saw national schools as an opportunity. They soon became the primary focus of their religious teachings.

This situation was mutually beneficial, the religious orders;

provided sites for school buildings, provided money for the buildings themselves and then taught in many schools free of charge (Griffin, 2019, p56,)

This is something that funding from the Irish government couldn't have provided. (Walsh, 2016, p14-15,) Not long after; "children in Ireland were attending schools whose patron was the local bishop and the manager was the local priest" (O'Donoghue and Harford, 2011, p321)

The Catholic Church has consistently taught both the value and expressed a preference for single-sex education, based above all on moral grounds. (Burleigh and McCloskey, III, 1994)

Co-education would be immoral and therefore futile to the very fabric of society as the church believed that men and women are so fundamentally different in cognition and ability.

There is no science to support this. (*The Irish Times*, 'Gender segregation', 2022)

This initial framework for primary schools which aimed towards a non denominational system, appeared to have scarcely any gender differences in terms of access to education and subjects. However, this didn't last long and as the Catholic Church's control over education grew, so too did the gender stereotyping within education.

By 1850, less than 4 % of National Schools were under conjoint clerical and lay management. By 1900, the system had become denominational in practice with nearly 65 % of schools denominationally homogeneous while 80 % had clerical managers (Walsh, 2016, p10)

And with the inception of national school subjects, so too came with it the beginning of prescribing subjects on the basis of gender.

In 1831 we saw that needlework was compulsory for girls. By 1872 we can see that the subjects that were exclusively for girls were aimed at their life within the home.

See figure 1 below.

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Essays in the History of Irish Education, edited by Brendan Walsh, Palgrave Macmillan Limited, 2016. ProQuest Ebook Central, <http://ebookcentral.proquest.com/lib/nui/detail.action?docId=4719900>. Created from nui on 2018-07-18 07:08:17.

30 T. WALSH

APPENDIX 1: COMPULSORY AND OPTIONAL SUBJECTS IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL CURRICULUM, 1872–1999¹³⁹

Year	Compulsory Subjects	Optional/Additional Subjects	Additional Notes
1831	Lesson Books (Reading), Arithmetic, Writing, Writing from Dictation, Grammar, Geography, Needlework (girls)	Extra branches included: British Poets, Mensuration, Geometry, Algebra, Book-keeping, Trigonometry, Music, Drawing, Physical and Applied Science	Branches for Females: Sewing, Knitting, Netting, Embroidery, Cutting-out
1872	Reading, Writing, Spelling, Grammar, Arithmetic, Geography, Needlework (girls), Agriculture (boys)	Vocal Music, Book-keeping, Kindergarten, Drawing, Instrumental Music, Algebra, Geometry and Mensuration, Trigonometry, Navigation, Mechanics, Hydrostatics and Pneumatics, Light and Sound, Heat and Steam Engine, Physical Geography, Heat and Magnetism, Botany, Animal Physiology and Zoology, Inorganic Chemistry, Geology, Latin, Greek, French, German, Irish, Handicraft, Hygiene, Spinning, Weaving, Netmending, Other Cottage Industries, Type-writing, Shorthand, Bee-keeping, Laundry Work (girls), Dressmaking (girls), Practical Cookery (girls), Dairying (girls), Management of Poultry (girls), Domestic Economy (girls)	There was little uptake of this broad array of optional subjects in Irish primary schools between 1872 and 1900.

(Fig.1)

(Walsh, 2016, p30)

This is something that is akin to the social climate at the time. You may be forgiven for thinking that figure 1, a document written so long ago, may hold no weight anymore in modern Ireland. Fast forward to 1965, a whole 93 years after this initial framework was prescribed, and there had been very little progress in terms of gender stereotyping.

The 1965 document 'the rules for national schools' states that needlework and laundry are compulsory subjects for girls in primary school. (*Dept. of Education, 'Rules for national schools', 1965, p39*) It has not been updated since then. See figure 2 below for the 1965 rules for national schools. Note that this is *still* on the department of education's official website.

CHAPTER X SECULAR INSTRUCTION

Programme of Secular Instruction.

70. (1) The Minister may prescribe a programme of instruction in any subject of the curriculum for pupils of national schools. He may, from time to time, alter the programme of instruction in any subject of the school curriculum.

(2) The following are the subjects of the curriculum of national schools:—

Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Needlework (Girls), Music, Rural Science or Nature Study, Drawing, Physical Training, Cookery (Girls), Laundry (Girls) or Domestic Economy (Girls), Manual Instruction (Boys).

(3) The following are **Obligatory Subjects**:—*

Irish, English, Mathematics, History, Geography, Needlework (Girls), Music.

(4) The following are **Optional Subjects**:—*

Drawing, Physical Training, Rural Science or Nature Study, Cookery (Girls), Laundry (Girls) or Domestic Economy (Girls), Manual Instruction (Boys).

(5) Special grants are paid for Cookery, Laundry and Domestic Economy under the terms of rule 147.

(Fig. 2)

(Dept. of Education, 'Rules for national schools', 1965, p39)

The fact that this document remains on the department of education's website is representative of the level of inertia in the department. This reflects the matter in question, that while we have excelled in many areas of equality, the social justice of women and girls in Ireland still leaves a lot to be updated and modernised. This unfortunately is not the only outdated official Irish clause or document which has yet to be removed or amended. Many of

these outdated attitudes can be said to be a direct result of the grip that the Catholic Church had on the Irish State.

The influence of the Catholic Church over Irish life even extended to the drafting of our constitution in 1937.

(Fig.3)



John

Charles McQuaid, Headmaster of Blackrock college, the Catholic Primate of Ireland and Archbishop of Dublin and Ireland's then President Éamon de Valera. (Irish America, 2020)
After gaining freedom from British rule, De Valera, a devout Catholic, looked to the Catholic church for support. John Charles McQuaid, then soon to be archbishop of Dublin, became his advisor and had a heavy hand to play in drafting our constitution. (Irish America, 2020)

McQuaid and DeValera evidently felt strongly about a woman's place being in the home.

Among McQuaid's more significant contributions to the constitution is a clause which outlines his views on women. The clause is as follows:

Article 41.2

In particular, the State recognises that by her life within the home, woman gives to the State a support without which the common good cannot be achieved.'

2: The state shall, therefore, endeavour to ensure that mothers shall not be obliged by economic necessity to engage in labour to the neglect of their duties in the home
(Government of Ireland, Constitution of Ireland, 1937)

A fact surrounding this section of our constitution which is rather unsettling is that this clause was only voted to be deleted as recently as 2021. (McGreevy, 2021). A referendum is set to be held in 2023 to delete this part of our constitution and replace it with ‘more appropriate wording’. (Houses of the Óireachtas, 2022) A referendum on this article of our constitution is welcomed, but grossly overdue. This tenet is eerily reminiscent of what can be found in The Bible in regards to a woman's place;

Titus 2:4-5:

And so train the young women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their own husbands, that the word of God may not be reviled.

(The Bible new testament, Epistle to titus, A.D. 64-65)

As outlandish these doctrines may seem in 2023, it could be said to have been regressive even for the time our constitution was written. As so many women played a huge part in Ireland's fight for gaining independence. Most famously, Countess Markievicz who took part in the Easter Rising of 1916, was responsible for setting up a republican group which trained boys to become nationalist soldiers, Na Fianna Éireann (Soldiers of Ireland). She served in the first Dáil Éireann which was set up under the leadership of De Valera. (Eldridge, 2022) Contradictory and regressive it may seem therefore that our constitution written 21 years later, and subject options presented over a hundred years later, attempt to confine women to the home. If the head of the religious order, *which is in control of our schools*, can write such a sexist contribution, it's easy to imagine how this rhetoric can trickle down into the way that the schools are operating.

Between all-boys and all-girls schools, there is a stark difference in what practical and traditionally ‘male’ and ‘female subjects’ are on offer. In many boys schools no option for

home economics is provided, as equally in girls schools, metal work and woodwork otherwise known as ‘technological subjects’ are omitted from the curriculum. This is linked to the overwhelmingly religious grip over our education system.

In 2023, the secondary school sector comprises a number of different categories. They are: community schools, voluntary schools and comprehensive schools, which are for the most part denominational (e.g Protestant or Roman Catholic). Vocational schools and community colleges are non-denominational. (Citizens Information, 2019) This means that Catholic schools are not state entities, and therefore the state cannot have a say on what is taught. This is decided by a board of management, which depending on the type of school, is usually composed of representatives of teachers, parents and the religious order. (ASTI, 2005). When we acknowledge that our youth are indeed our future, why are we allowing a religious order to continue to be at the helm? This shows us that the Catholic Church, to this day, has an immense amount of power over the future of Ireland.

There have been waves of change happening in the way we approach this issue of religion having hold over schools and this change is inevitably going to have a ripple effect.

Chapter 2:

The importance of choice, the need for change.

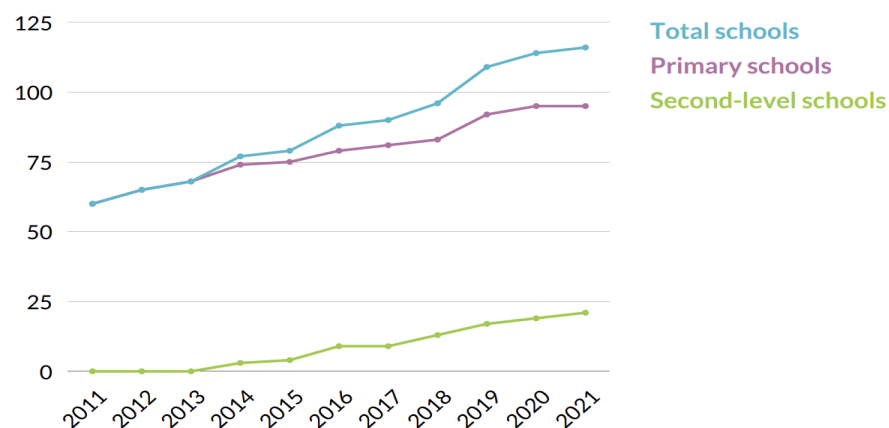
Beginning with primary school education, long has it been that for a child to attend a Catholic primary school in Ireland – which make up 90% of our primary schools– (Griffin, p58, 2019) baptism was preferred and in cases of a considerable high number of applications per capacity, children who were baptised were given priority over those who identified as either non-religious, or belonged to a religious minority. This became colloquially known as the ‘baptism barrier’. The introduction and increasing popularity of Educate Together schools

have made headway in ending this form of religious segregation. As per their website, they state that:

There is no faith formation/instruction in any religion during the school day in an Educate Together school. Schools provide facilities for the teaching of faith formation after school, if requested. No student will ever be asked their religion as part of the enrolment process. No students will ever be separated or treated differently in any way due to their religious or philosophical beliefs in an Educate Together school. (Educate Together, 2015)

Educate Together schools are also co-educational and so as well as not discriminating based on religion they also do not discriminate based on gender. This seems to have been well received by the Irish public. Based on figures, Educate Together has certainly become increasingly popular in recent years. In 2021, their network comprised 95 primary and 21 secondary schools in Ireland. (Educate Together, annual report, 2021). See figure 4 below demonstrating the rising popularity of Educate Together schools.

The Educate Together school network 2011 - 2021



(Fig.4) The Educate together school network 2011-2021 (Educate Together, 2021)

The momentum created by this Educate Together movement has spearheaded a change in our attitudes towards the link between religion and education on the island of Ireland. People began to question the need or relevance of a baptism cert in the admissions process to begin with. The Admissions to Schools Act came into effect in 2019 and made it no longer possible for primary schools to base their enrolment criteria on a child's religion. (Govt. of Ireland,

Admissions to school act, *Irish statute book*, 2018) This amended section 7(3)(c) of the Equal status act 2000 which stated that in cases of lack of capacity, primary schools could place preference over children who were baptised. (McLoughlin, 2018)

There seems to be a rejection taking place. What relevance does a predominantly Catholic school system have in the Ireland of today? We can see from census figures that there has been a sharp decrease in the number of people aligning themselves with the Catholic religion, and even more are identifying as non-religious. (Central Statistics Office, 2017) A report on the change of religion report from the central statistics office states that;

While Ireland remains a predominantly Catholic country, the percentage of the population who identified as Catholic on the census has fallen sharply from 84.2 per cent in 2011 to 78.3 per cent in 2016. There has been a corresponding rise in the number with no religion which grew by 73.6 percent from 269,800 to 468,400, an increase of 198,600.

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)

See figure 5 below showing this decline in people identifying as Catholic:

Table 8.1 Population by religion, 2011 and 2016			
Religion	2011	2016	Percentage change
000s			
Roman Catholic	3,861.3	3,729.1	-3.4
Church of Ireland	129.0	126.4	-2.0
Muslim (Islamic)	49.2	63.4	28.9
Orthodox	45.2	62.2	37.5
Christian	41.2	37.4	-9.1
Presbyterian	24.6	24.2	-1.6
Hindu	10.7	14.3	34.1
Apostolic or Pentecostal	14.0	13.4	-4.9
Other	70.2	97.7	39.1
No religion	269.8	468.4	73.6
Not stated	72.9	125.3	71.8
Total	4,588.3	4,761.9	3.8

(Fig.5) Population by Religion 2011 and 2017

(Central Statistics Office, 2017)

It can be said, based on this evidence, and the implementation of the ‘Admissions to School Act’, that religion is slowly becoming less relevant in our lives when compared to past decades. In terms of how secondary schools are operating, this is not necessarily reflected in the speed at which our appetite for change is being met. As for some, the argument for single sex schools has been separated from its origins of religion.

It has been argued that there are academic and psychological benefits to separating children based on gender. If an argument is to be made for single sex schools, this should be based on evidence of a better academic outcome. However, such evidence is scarce and what does exist is debatable. Some academics claim that girls in particular who attend single-sex schools are more likely to succeed in leadership roles, however it’s important to note that on average, single-sex schools tend to be in more affluent areas (Sullivan, 2011, p311) And we now know that the best predictors of a child's success are their parents income and education. (Pazzanese, 2014).

There is a correlation between high achievers and single sex schools but gender segregation cannot be said to be the definitive cause of this success. Is the purpose of a secondary school not to prepare our children for the real world? For future careers?

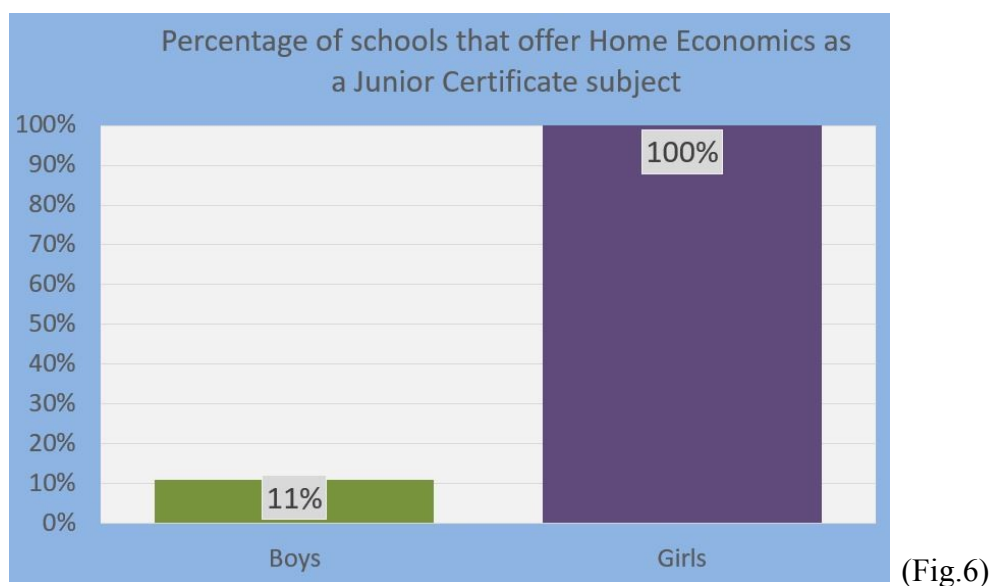
If young boys and girls are not taught to view each other as equals, if we are not conditioned to being around one another harmoniously from a young age, it can only lead to further gender disparity. We all must coexist in this world and learn that we are much more alike than we have been previously led to believe. To condition a child to, for the most part, only interact with children of the same gender, what happens when that child attends a university alongside the opposite sex? How will that child grow up to treat that girl equally in the workplace?

In fact, there is a higher rate of divorce among men who have attended a single-sex school.
(Garner, 2006)

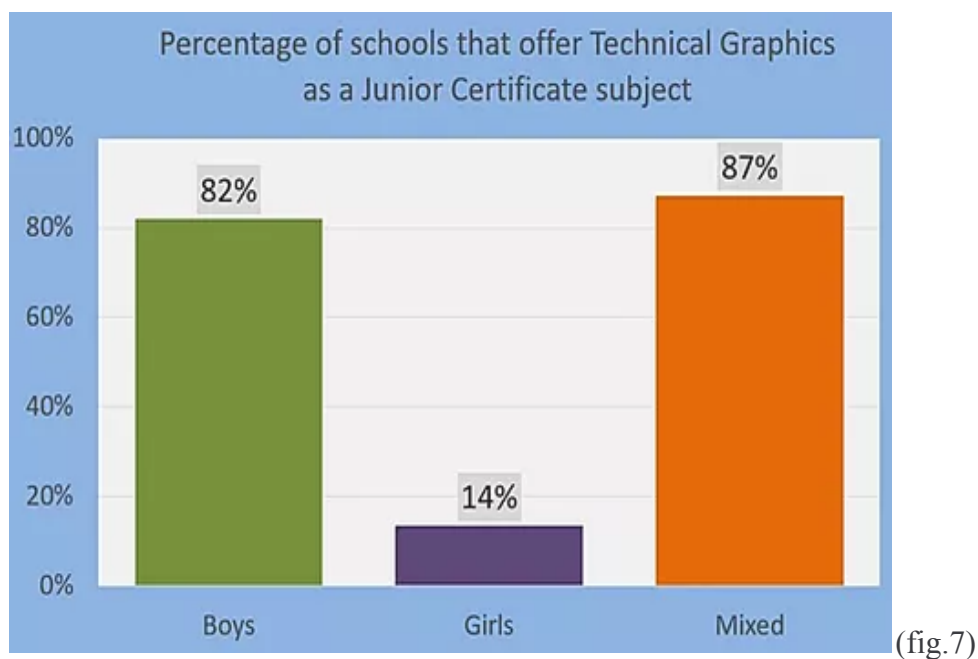
37% of men from boys-only schools are divorced by the time they reach the age of 42 - compared with just 28% from co-educational schools. (Garner, 2006)
It can be said therefore that these single-sex environments breed gender stereotyping, and make it harder for the sexes to get along in their adult life. This along with the inconclusive correlation between high achievers and single sex schools should be enough of an argument against the practice. It is not only the separation of children based on gender in schools that is problematic, as there are arguments for and against this. The aspect which is so contradictory with our culture of equality in modern Ireland is the huge discrepancies in **subject choice** offered across all-boys and all-girls schools. Between these schools, there is a stark difference in what practical subjects are on offer. A point which is acknowledged by Labour Party TD Áodhán Ó Ríordáin;

At a secondary school level, we all know that in single gender schools that subject choice can be extremely limited leading to restricted subject choice and gender stereotyping in too many of our second level schools. Segregation also makes it more challenging to break down barriers to gender equality when we separate boys and girls.
(Ó Ríordáin, 2022)

See below fig.6 showing the percentage of schools that offer Home Economics as a junior certificate subject.



(Athena Analytics, 2018)



(Athena Analytics, 2018)

What we can see blatantly in fig.6 and fig.7 is that girls in single sex schools are still being more geared towards a life within the home. While young boys are actively being shown that to be a homemaker is not their job. And it comes as no surprise, as article 41.2. in our constitution to this day states that this is a woman's proper place. (Government of Ireland, 1937) What this graph does not account for however, is the custom which is sometimes practised in areas where all-boys and all-girls schools are in close proximity. In some cases,

schools liaise with one another and allow for children to use the facilities of either school to broaden the range of subjects offered. So the number of boys taking home economics may be considerably higher.

It's interesting to note that these discrepancies appear to be affecting women's careers more than men. We can see this impact on the careers of women when we look at the numbers entering apprenticeships.

There are still only 270 women craft apprentices, or 1% of the craft population.
There are 5 craft apprenticeship programmes with not a single woman, and 11 craft programmes with less than 5 women.
(Further and Higher Education, 2022)

Despite so few boys' schools offering home economics, it doesn't appear that this hinders boys' progression into culinary professions. In fact, 69% of chefs in Ireland are male. (Falvey, 2021). The reason for this is unclear, however through anecdotal surveying I have found that this practice of liaising with other single sex schools often favours boys over girls.

Based on anecdotal evidence I have collected, through speaking with my peers about their experience in single sex schools, there appears to be frustration among students around the restrictive stereotyping influencing subjects at second level. Oonagh who attended Loreto convent in Donegal told me of her experience with asking for this collaboration to materialise;

I went to an all-girls catholic school and the only optional subjects were home-ec and music. Girls used to beg to be allowed to go to the other schools in the area for woodwork etc but we were told by teachers that it wasn't for ladies (Keegan, 2022)

Maya of St.Louis school Rathmines told me how this worked when she was in school;

(O)ur school didn't offer any sort of metal or woodwork, or technical graphics.
The private boys school down the road, St.Mary's, were allowed to come use our kitchens for home ec, but not vice versa.
(Keegan, 2022)

It is important to note that key findings in a report from the ERSI in 2005 state that even in schools with girls attending which provide technological subjects, there is a lower uptake of these subjects by girls. (Darmody and Smyth, 2005)

Even where girls attend schools providing technological subjects, they are much less likely to take these subjects than boys. This gender gap is slightly narrower in larger schools and schools in urban areas.
(Darmody and Smyth, 2005)

This uptake could be improved by cooperation and a reduction in gender stereotyping by schools themselves. We see that technological subjects are commonly timetabled against typically female subjects such as home ec (Darmody and Smyth, 2005). This gap in subject uptake is not a case of ability. It is a case of peer, and societal pressure and *availability*. The stereotyping is coming from both ends. In my school, we had the option of woodwork and metalwork but we had to choose our optional subjects *before* trying them out. The general gendering attitudes of subjects may lead a child to choose a subject that they think they *should* be good at, based solely on their gender. If schools placed greater emphasis on choosing after trying, this may iron out the discrepancies. Young children make a lot of their decisions with the interest of not going against the status quo, children have a reluctance to be seen to be different in order to feel accepted by peers.

If a young girl has an option but sees that it's rare to see a woman in woodwork or metalwork, she may decide against choosing it. The reason that it's so rare for women to do woodwork or metalwork, is exactly because on average there isn't the option. This is a cycle that needs to be broken from the top down. There needs to be a systematic change on all levels in the way schools operate to offer more comprehensive choices to young boys and girls. Some girls are better off in a trade apprenticeship, but will likely never be given the opportunity to explore this possibility because they were lumped into home economics, music or art because of their gender. Gearing women towards a life within the home may have

certainly been aligned with the cultural context of the country in times past. However, in the current social, economic and cultural climate it is completely impractical and archaic to narrow a person's options so minutely based on a physiological fact rather than the content of their character and abilities.

So what is ahead of us in the way of change? There have been both passive and active moves towards a more level playing field within schools. A passive fact being that the Department of Education has not sanctioned a new single-sex school in over 24 years. (Gender segregation has had its day, *The Irish Times*, 2022)

In terms of proaction, there have been incentives put in place to right these wrongs. In 2022, Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science Simon Harris announced a gender-based bursary for apprenticeship employers. (Dept. of Further and Higher Education, 2022) Employers are entitled to a bursary of €2,666 if they; 'employ apprentices on any national apprenticeship programme with greater than 80% representation of a single gender.' (Dept. of Further and Higher Education, 2022) Minister Simon Harris said that this would be a great incentive for employers to take on more female apprentices. Although, I struggle to believe that the issue of women within construction for example, is an issue of employers actively rejecting an influx of female applicants.

Perhaps the employers are not simply presented with enough women expressing interest in the first place. The only thing we need now are women who are aware that they are interested.

Undoubtedly a well meaning proposal, however it does feel misguided. Akin to treatment for a symptom rather than a cure for the root cause. The truth is, why would a woman be incentivised to enter into an apprenticeship in a field with which she has had no previous

experience of in school? In order for this incentive to be effective we first need to offer young women the comprehensive option to try out a wide range of subjects, not just those which are stereotypically female. An anecdote from my own experience lends itself to this idea.

In secondary school when it came to choosing our optional subjects, I knew that I liked working with my hands, but wasn't sure what exactly that would look like. None of my close friends were choosing metalwork or woodwork and so this undoubtedly led me to choosing music and art. Upon leaving school and deciding to pursue art, doing my portfolio and beginning my journey in NCAD, I had no idea that jewellery making was an option for me. It wasn't until our elective modules in 1st year when I had the confidence to try something solely for my self interest, not based on peer choices. The moment I set foot in the jewellery workshop I knew that it was for me, and I have been falling steadily more in love with the trade ever since.

As it turns out, I am good at working with my hands. But not in a traditional, female way. I hold tools and wield fire. I solder and punch and drill and saw. I do the opposite of what I was told I would enjoy. (Keegan, 2022)

Based on this anecdote, we can see that the subject options available to young boys and girls are not in place for a matter of capability or interest. To create a more inclusive and equal system, is a matter of equal access, encouragement and nurturing of individuality. As we look ahead to 2023, we can rest assured that change is occurring. And it seems now that our thirst for equality and change is not stopping any time soon.

2023 will see the referendum on changing article 41 of our constitution stating a woman's proper place.

As we saw with the marriage act and the abortion rights referendum, it is likely that a constitutional referendum will be required if we are to see equality across education. As article 44.2.5° of our constitution affords religious denominations the rights to operate our schools, (McLoughlin, 2018) We are more than capable of bringing Ireland into the 21st century and giving our children the future they deserve, especially if it means making changes to our constitution that was written in a much different Ireland. The future of our education system looks bright.

In February 2022, Aodhán Ó Ríordáin of the labour party, published a bill calling for an end to all single sex schooling in Ireland within 15 years.

The bill, 'Education (Admissions to schools) Co-Education Bill 2022' was initiated in the Dáil in March of 2022 and has passed the first stage. It now stands at the second stage which will see the general principles of the bill being debated. (Houses of the Óireachtas, 2022)

‘This Bill is about addressing the legacy of single gender schools and move to fully gender integrated schools within 10 years at primary level and 15 years at secondary level.’ (Ó Ríordáin, 2022)

This bill is an immense step forward in making Ireland become fully congruent with its socially just ideals. These seeds of change are slowly beginning to germinate.

Conclusion

It's clear from many indicators that the Irish populace has come to agreement that the Catholic Church, while having had such an intrinsic link with the inception of the state and our history as a nation, should not be granted such potent power over our present or our future. The church's practice of single sex schooling is not backed by science or morality, it is now under pressure and the changing power of raising questions is being utilised. There is no place for gender segregation in modern Ireland. We as a country have fallen behind the rest of Europe in many aspects of updating those systems which are outdated. Keeping an article in our constitution which is no longer reflective of the ideals of our people is not serving us. We must change with the times. We have made enormous strides in the way of modernising our country in the name of equality and redefining what it means to grow up, be educated and live in Ireland. This makes me feel immensely hopeful. In reflection I see the steps we have taken away from almost exclusive Catholic education as a step towards a more non

denominational Ireland, that which is more in line with what was initially outlined in the initial framework for our national school system. Incentives put in place by the government to encourage more female apprentices are well meaning but more work is to be done from much earlier in life, much earlier in school. There is no ethical, scientific or social advantage to separating children based solely on gender. And it would seem a contradiction to teach children about equality in a classroom with no representation present by the other half of the population.

At the forefront of this change has been the emphasis that we now place on **choice**. In keeping with this, parents have a right to choose to send their child to a single-sex school. But in those schools, there should also be a choice for which subjects that child would like to take. After all, the subjects that a child is exposed to in school will shape their future, inevitably shaping ours. And this choice is important, choice is what makes a society equal. We have made changes for choice on who to marry, on what to do with our bodies. And going forward, hopefully, choice over our education.

Appendix;

I asked the following question on my instagram story to elicit responses from people who have experienced gender stereotyping in single sex schools regarding subject options;

Caroline Keegan:

‘I'm wondering if I know any girls who were denied the option of doing metalwork or woodwork in school simply because of their gender
And do I know any boys that weren't allowed to do home ec for the same reason?

Reply to this if you know of any schools that practised this!’

Maya O’Shea:

‘Perhaps not exactly what you mean, but our school (st.louis secondary rathmines all girls public catholic school) did not offer any sort of metal or woodwork or tech graph, but the private boys school lads (st marys) were allowed to come use our kitchens for home ec, but not vice versa’

Anna McAllister:

‘coláiste íosagain stillorgan (we) weren’t allowed do business till(sic) 4th year’

Órlaith Duke:

‘We didn't have metalwork and woodwork as an option in our school (Our Lady’s Terenure) because it was all girls’

Siobhán Curtis:

‘Heyy don't know if it's denied as such but in my hometown, the girl school and boy school are two separate schools and they only teach home-Ec in the girls and woodwork/ metalwork in the boys. We can't choose to do it, we don't even get the option. Hope that was helpful’

Suzi (did not want surname included):

‘YES! I wasn't allowed any of them and had to bring my mom in to talk to the principal and they still wouldn't let me’

Oonagh McNamara:

‘(I) Went to an all girls school and the only options were home ec and music, girls used to beg to be allowed to go to one of the other schools for woodwork etc but teachers said it wasn't "for ladies" ‘- Oonagh McNamara

Sarah Geraghty:

‘my school didn't (deny us) but i was one of 2 girls in my class that did woodwork’

Sadhbh O’Leary:

‘I mean in my all girls secondary there was no option to do metal work, wood work, tech graph/DCG none of that. I think such is the case with the vast majority of all girls schools as far as I know’

Alexander Kelleher:

‘I didn’t go to a mixed school, so we didn’t have home ec - because we were boys. That was the reason for not having the subject. We advocated for this to be brought in, got signature’s the whole thing - met with school faculty, etc - and then was laughed at by the board of directors for the school for the idea. “We aren’t girls, that’s why the girls school has home ec” was some of the things told to us’

Molly Hartnett:

‘I went to an all girls school and they didn't even have a metalwork or woodwork option and the boys school across the road didn't have home ec, not sure if this is relevant to you but there ya go’

Eva Kerley:

‘I went to an all girls school and there was no classes even for metal work, woodwork and even technology’

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