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Concordia University–Portland
College of Education
Doctorate of Education Program

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CERTIFY THAT WE HAVE READ AND APPROVE THE DISSERTATION OF

Gwendolyn Ivery

CANDIDATE FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

Brianna Parsons Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee

Leslie Loughmiller Ed.D., Content Specialist

Simyka Carlton, Ed.D., Content Reader

Teacher Perceptions of How Attire Affects Student Behavior and Academic Performance:
A Case Study

Gwendolyn Ivery
Concordia University–Portland
College of Education

Dissertation submitted to the Faculty of the College of Education
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Education in
Instructional Leadership

Brianna Parsons Ed.D., Faculty Chair Dissertation Committee
Leslie Loughmiller Ed.D., Content Specialist
Simyka Carlton, Ed.D., Content Reader

Concordia University–Portland

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Abstract

This qualitative single case study sought to examine middle school teachers' perceptions about how their attire impacts student behavior and academic performance. The study took place in a school district located in Texas, with the target population being middle school teachers at a Title I school. Twelve certified teachers with varying degrees of experience and expertise within a particular content area contributed to this study. After using a semistructured interview process as well as teacher observations, data were coded and analyzed with the aim of allowing general themes to emerge. The results of this study align with the conceptual framework of Bandura's social learning theory, which speculates that people learn from one another, through observation, imitation, and modeling. In addition, the results point to issues that administrators and school board members should consider in order to ensure a higher rate of success among teachers in the classroom. This study may also be used as a resource to assist new teachers coming into the profession; it provides them with tools for making appropriate decisions when it comes to their attire. For that matter, the study provides recommendations about what constitutes "appropriate" professional attire in the first place. In summary, this qualitative case study revealed that most teachers believe their attire can affect students' academic performance as well as their behavior.

Keywords: appropriate clothes for the classroom, professional attire, professionalism, student behavior, teachers

Dedication

I want to dedicate this dissertation to all my angels on earth as well as in heaven who continue to watch over me; and more importantly, to the One who heard my disparaging cry and when it seemed impossible, He made it possible. “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me” (Philippians 4:13, New International Version).

Acknowledgments

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Common facets of everyday life have a very subtle but profound influence on human interaction. Clothing is one such influence. Charles W. Morris, a human behaviorist and sociobiologist, suggested that our attire transmits social signals (Carr, Davies, & Lavin, 2009). Attire and appearance are forms of nonverbal communication that allow others to interpret an individual through externally available information, instead of having to rely solely on inner representational resources (Angerosa, 2014). The cultural and social implications of teachers' attire have been a focus of research over the years. As Sampson (2016) noted, an important topic for further study is the influence a teacher's attire can have on predetermining the culture of his or her classroom.

This study explores the effect teachers' attire has on students' behavior and learning. Through observations and interviews of certified teachers at a suburban middle school in Texas, the study investigated the teachers' perceptions about how their attire affects students' behavior and learning. Mosca and Buzza (2013) observed that people have begun to go to work in whatever clothing they themselves feel is acceptable; for some, that means dressing in the way one would to attend a sporting event. However, the wearing of professional attire by teachers is an essential component of the positive enhancement of the school climate. Thus, Jewell (2010), as noted in Sampson (2016), deduced that a teacher's attire and appearance can influence the attitudes that their students have toward them.

Background, Context, History, and Conceptual Framework for the Problem

According to the U.S. Department's National Center for Education Statistics (2017), 3.2 million public school teachers educate the nation's 50.7 million children who attend public, K–12 schools. The behavior of students in the classroom has become an increasingly important

issue (O'Brennan, Bradshaw, & Furlong, 2014). Equally critical is the subject of how teachers, administrators, and others working in the field of education can manage student behavior in ways that ensure a productive learning environment for all students. Reducing problematic behavior by students remains a leading concern for school staff, as disruptive behavior interferes with student achievement and the general school climate. Students may display a variety of behavioral characteristics in school due to their upbringing or cultural background (Khine & Atputhasamy, 2002). Some of these behaviors need to be managed for schools to function as effective learning institutions. Likewise, teachers, through their personal choices and professional demeanor, affect the learning environment in a multitude of ways (Rubie-Davies, Hattie, & Hamilton, 2006). However, the multidimensional issues involved make it difficult for researchers and practitioners to identify factors influencing students' behavior. In the terms afforded by the socio-cognitive learning theory of Bandura (1989), the social climate of the classroom can considerably affect the development of student behavior as well as how teachers interact with students. As Bandura's model suggests, the educational environment is an accumulation of issues, including social interactions between students and teachers, as well as mutual behavioral and academic expectations.

According to Semlak and Pearson (2008), teacher credibility plays a critical role in the dynamics of today's classrooms and can be a significant variable affecting teacher-student interaction. In today's society, schools and classrooms are institutions that shape a student's character, and teacher attire may in turn influence students' attitudes toward their teachers (Borba, 2006). Maintaining a professional image is thus vitally important for members of the teaching profession. Miller (2004) addressed how appropriate attire can make the difference between appearing competent versus incompetent on the job, while also facilitating teacher-

student interaction. Most important, attire is a powerful communicator, which can be understood in light of ideas about social learning. Bandura (1989) based his exploration of social learning on the reciprocal interaction between behavior and environmental influences. Likewise, the central concern of this investigation is to situate teachers' perceptions of the how their attire affects students in the broader contexts where social learning takes place.

Statement of the Problem

Keeler (2004) noted that teachers' attire has changed substantially over the past 50 years, as formal business attire has given way to a more casual approach to dressing for the classroom. Saiki (2006) found that students perceived teachers who were dressed professionally as more knowledgeable and qualified. One of the primary roles of a teacher is to transmit knowledge to students. Whether or not they are successful at this depends on, among other factors, the students' perceptions of teachers as reliable sources of information (Strauss, 1993).

In some school districts, there is no standard approach to employee dress. In Texas, several school districts have general policies, while others have specific requirements addressing topics such as facial hair and footwear. As a result, it cannot be definitively determined whether the plan successfully encourages teachers to dress professionally. The lack of professional attire continues to be addressed in meetings with the principals as well as the school board, but the discussions conclude without workable solutions being proposed. In any case, professionalism and the acquisition of professional comportment are important in school settings (Rubio, 2010). According to administrators in the Human Resource Department, complaints waged by parents expressed that teachers who come to school in "too casual" attire might not be competent in their ability to teach. The professional attire of the teachers at the suburban middle school in Texas that served as a case study for this research has become more casual over the past few years, and

according to the school district this trend has gotten the attention of some parents. In an effort to address comprehensively the key issues at play in this connection, this qualitative case study sought to explore the perceptions articulated by middle school teachers concerning the effects that professional attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perception of the influence that their attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning in one middle school in Texas. To examine whether teachers perceived professional attire as an essential factor in influencing middle school students' behavior and learning, I investigated the personal opinions and perceptions of 12, sixth through eighth grade teachers through personal interviews. They also took part in observations, in which teachers made notations of their interaction with students based on their attire. The study aims to heighten teachers' awareness regarding the significance of their attire and the role it plays in the school's culture and society.

Research Questions

Research questions similar to those used in Sampson's (2016) study formed the basis of this investigation, in part to test whether those questions would yield similar results. The two overarching questions were as follows:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?
2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

Rationale, Relevance, and Significance of the Study

This study is important to middle and secondary level teachers, administrators, students,

and parents because it highlights strategies for providing effective practices in the classroom. These practices focus on reducing potential disruptions in the class, allowing more instructional time and potentially contributing to academic achievement. Also, the present investigation can assist in ensuring that students are more focused on in-school assignments, so that parents receive less workday telephone call interruptions to address their children's disruptive behaviors or academic problems. Many teachers may be unaware of the influence their appearance has on students and the educational environment; yet, because teachers not just professionals but also role models, students' perceptions of their educators are essential. Workman and Freeburg (2010) revealed that students learn attitudes and behaviors by observing teachers; therefore, teachers should be concerned about every facet of the modeling effect, including the attire they wear in the classroom.

In an era of teacher accountability, teachers need to set the standard for their dress in schools to gain credibility and enhance professionalism, and also to present themselves appropriately (Delisio, 2006). The findings of this study may thus benefit the following groups:

1. District superintendents: The information gathered in this investigation could offer superintendents a framework that allows them to assist administrators in realizing the importance of professional attire.
2. School Administrators: Principals and other administrators can use this information by creating conditions where they can address appropriate attire for effective teaching.
3. Teachers: The results of this study could be significant to teachers, serving as a framework that can be used to establish standards for proper teacher professional dress (Gorham et al., 1999). This investigation may enhance their teaching

environment (as well as their image management on campus), their overall teaching effectiveness, and their ability to serve as role models for their students.

4. Future researchers: This study may encourage further research on the impact of professional teachers' dress on image management as well as teaching effectiveness, particularly for K–12 students.

Definition of Terms

Appearance: This word will be used synonymously with the term *attire* (Freeburg & Workman, 2008). Clothing relates to the covering and ornaments that are the total outward design of the human body (Roach, Higgins, & Eicher, 1992). Furthermore, according to Tichenor (2005), the appearance and attire of professional teachers is an exhibited behavior that enters into judgments about whether or not an instructor is a professional. Miller (2004) stated that appropriate attire can help create an image in which one appears competent on the job, while also facilitating teacher-student interactions. Thus, according to Carr et al. (2009), professional appearance is an aspect of professional behavior that has a positive impact on students' perceptions of teachers.

Appropriate: Although suitable attire for the profession includes a range of clothing options, the definition of what counts as appropriate is clothing that can properly serve as professional attire (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Attire: Merriam-Webster (n.d.) defines *attire* as dress, clothing, apparel, or outfit. Appropriate dress promotes a professional image. Professional attire comprises dress that would be appropriate in a conventional business setting, such as men's and women's suits. The most critical indicators of professionalism are grooming and business dress attire. In school settings,

business casual attire is better than casual attire, but business dress remains the best (Ruetzler, Taylor, Reynolds, Baker, & Killen, 2012).

Behavior: This term refers to problematic student actions (e.g., call-outs, talking to other students, out-of-seat, throwing objects, staring around the room, tapping pencil) that typically elicit reprimands by a teacher during instruction, or else independent seatwork (Lannie & McCurdy, 2007).

Credibility: This term refers to the quality of being believable or worthy of trust (Merriam-Webster, n.d.).

Learning environment: Conceptually speaking, the learning environment refers to the whole range of components and activities within which learning happens. Educators refer to a classroom or a place where teaching and learning take place as a learning environment (Great Schools.org, 2019.)

Middle schoolers: These are students in grades 6 through 8.

Perception: This term can be defined as an idea or impression formulated about a person, about other ideas, or about an object (Parry, 2010).

Professionalism: This term refers to a set of practices that encompasses behavior, attitude, attributes, values, role behavior, and obligations. Professionalism is revealed when teachers accept the challenges to teach and are able to demonstrate students' learning in specific content areas—with "learning," in this context, referring to knowledge, attitude, skills, and habits (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). Professionalism plays a vital role in how a person is perceived by his or her employer, coworkers, and casual contacts—and by every person with whom the person interacts.

Respect: This term denotes a definite feeling of esteem, honor, or deference for a person, and also to specific actions and conduct representative of that esteem (Respect, n.d.).

Self-confidence: A person exudes self-confidence when he or she has confidence, belief, or trust in his or her abilities (“Self-confidence,” n.d.).

Teacher effectiveness: Teacher effectiveness is sometimes considered to be an indicator or prediction of teaching effectiveness; the term refers to a teacher’s belief in his or her ability to execute the course of action needed to affect student performance positively (Gordon, 2010).

Teacher perception: Teacher perception refers to the subjective judgment a teacher makes about student behavior (Hughes, Gleason, & Zhang, 2005).

Unprofessional attire: According to Workman and Freeman (2010), this term can be defined in terms of immodest dress that includes necklines that are too revealing and apparel that is too short or too tight. Additional problematic items of dress include clothing such as t-shirts, midriff tops, workout attire, and underwear worn on the outside of the garment.

Assumptions

The inclusion criteria of the sample were appropriate; in other words, all the participants selected for this study have experienced the same or similar events in relation to classroom attire vis-à-vis students’ behavior and learning. The study assumed that participants answered honestly, since their anonymity and confidentiality were carefully preserved. Also, participants were able to withdraw from the study at any time and with no ramifications. Every attempt was made to ensure questions were asked in an objective, unbiased manner.

Limitations

There are certain limitations inherent to qualitative research (Simon & Goes, 2013), including relatively small sample sizes. As Simon and Goes (2013) put it, “Although case studies may be suggestive of what is found in similar organizations, additional research would be required to verify whether the findings from one study would generalize elsewhere” (Simon & Goes, 2013, para. 4). Furthermore, at the middle school where this case study was conducted, district policy disallowed student participation. Therefore, in this case study, the research focused on the importance of professional teacher dress and its use in teaching practice as perceived by middle school teachers.

Delimitations

The delimitation of a study are those characteristics that arise from limitations and are a result of specific choices by the researcher (Simon & Goes, 2013). In the present study, the participants were restricted to sixth, seventh, and eighth grade certified teachers in their campus setting in Texas. The study was thus limited to a single contributing middle school and the responses of its teachers. The responses to the questions determined the merit of the data, with every effort being made to obtain honest and thorough responses from the participants.

Summary

This chapter has laid foundations for and outlined the research aims of this case study. It introduced the problem, detailed the significance of the study, and defined the terms used throughout the investigation. Chapter 2 is a review of the research literature on professional attire and appearance, as well as on the perception of attire, its impact, and its relation to issues of social change. The research questions center on teachers’ perceptions of how their attire affects student’s behavior and are further developed in Chapter 3. Chapter 3 describes the instruments

used in the study, the procedures for analyzing data, and also the limitations of the research design. It discusses, too, the methods that were used to collect data that answer the research questions. The significance of nonverbal communication within the classroom, in general, and the attire of teachers in particular cannot be over-emphasized as a critical part of the learning environment. This case study explored teachers' perceptions of such nonverbal communication in the domain of dress, examining the practical impact of their attire on middle school students' behavior and learning as well as the teaching profession more broadly.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Any school or district committed to the mission of educating students expects certain instructional and assessment practices from its teaching staff. However, those expectations appear to be more lenient when it comes to setting standards in other, equally important areas, such as teacher attire (Sternberg, 2016). While most educators define standards of learning required for teachers seeking a certification, standards of professional attire for educators are not often established. Some of the common criteria for effective teachers as they relate to students are to design, implement, and assess learning experiences; to engage students and improve learning; enrich professional practice; and provide positive models for students, colleagues, and the community (Sternberg, 2016). However, standards for teacher appearance vary significantly throughout schools, creating problems with which both new and veteran teachers struggle. Those problems encompass everything from clothing and cosmetics to hair color and tattoos (Bland, 2005).

As a result, controversy continues to swirl around discussions of teacher attire. At the same time, the cultural and social significance of teachers' attire remains of interest to researchers. To illustrate, Carr, Davies, and Levin (2009) studied the social and cultural implications of teachers' attire and its impact on students. Their inquiry suggests that the attire worn by faculty members in the college classroom can affect student perceptions of an instructor's credibility and thus the effectiveness of the teacher. Furthermore, research has found that an instructor's credibility benefits both the professor and the student when it comes to the effectiveness of teaching and learning (Carr et al., 2009).

In earlier research in this area, McCracken and Roth (1989) explored the idea that clothing conveys cultural meaning. They suggest that the potency of clothing communication

relies on a “code,” which represents knowledge about social and cultural norms that members of communities or social groups share. As the authors put it, “Minor modifications to clothing style can have a major impact on the information conveyed to the perceivers” (McCracken & Roth, 1989, p. 16). Their research showed that the better individuals understand this particular coding system, the more effective the clothing will be at communicating information. Along the same lines, Larson (2004) asserted that understanding human social behavior requires individuals to pay crucial attention to nonverbal communication signals. Clothes are one of the nonverbal signals that inevitably transmit social signals and are closely related to self-representation; therefore, they can be used to make the desired impression. Because teachers are influential, their choice of attire, as well as their other professional attributes, can inspire their students to appreciate learning.

A thorough investigation of the research relevant to this study was conducted via literature searches in scholarly databases, with the aim of gathering the essential information for the study. In presenting the resulting literature review, this chapter begins with a more detailed outline of the conceptual framework guiding the analysis of the study than the one provided in chapter 1. Next, a review of the relevant literature is included, beginning with a review of historical studies on teacher attire and its effect on student achievements. After a review of other literature relevant for the study, such as research on teacher attire vis-à-vis professionalism and nonverbal communication, as well as studies of the impact of teacher attire on student achievement, a review of key methodological issues in the study of teacher attire is provided. A synthesis and critique of the previous research follows, with a summary then concluding Chapter 2.

Teacher Attire and the Classroom Environment

A classroom environment is a place in which both teachers and student's nonverbal behaviors have important implications for learning (Reynolds, 2014). Despite the difficulties of teaching at the middle school level, a teacher's primary goal must be the enhancement of students' academic achievements. Some of the complications of teaching middle school deal arise from the challenging nature of student-teacher interactions at the middle-school level. During adolescence, students enter a phase of life where their identity and confidence is at a critical stage (Sanjiyan-Barg, 2009). Assuming that there will be some distractions as students struggle with their identity, a teacher who is not dressed professionally may cause further distractions for students already struggling to find their way.

According to Gunderson (2000), successful classroom teaching can be sidetracked by student distractions and defiant behaviors. Apart from parents, "it is the student's teacher who is effectively in the front seat regarding his/her personality development and both academic and social performance" (Uluga, Ozdenb, & Eryilmaz, 2011, p. 739). When teachers are role models for their students, in part by being dressed in professional attire, this sends an important message to students (Uluga et al., 2011). As mentioned previously, one of the teacher's primary roles is to transmit knowledge to students, and their fulfillment of this role hinges on students' perceptions of teachers as reliable sources of information (Raviv et al., 2003). Therefore, when teachers dress professionally, students can see how adult professionals look and behave, while also viewing the teacher as a respected authority.

Significance

Although dress codes for teachers are not clearly defined in many districts across the state, for students, the policies of attire are established and leave little room for confusion. In the

2013–2014 school year, over 50% of public schools enforced a strict dress code for students—but not for teachers (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017). Administrators argue that many teachers are abusing the freedom afforded by these lax policies (Ettenheim, 2011). Some districts still maintain that teachers should have free will to make their own decisions on what they consider to be professional; but research has indicated that a teacher’s appearance can influence their professionalism and their professional demeanor in the classroom. If a teacher’s attire is either overly casual or age-inappropriate, this might get students’ attention, but unfortunately at the cost of that teacher’s authority and control over the classroom (Butler & Roesel, 1989). Therefore, there is significant value in researching teachers’ perceptions of the effect their attire has on middle school students’ behavior and learning. Work in this area can make a difference in how teachers select their attire.

Slepian, Ferber, Gold, and Rutchicket (2015) showed that the more formally individuals dress for any occasion, the more likely they are to have higher-order thinking skills. The investigation concluded that “formal attire makes one feel more important and authoritative, leading their thinking in a similar direction. This belief in improved appearance leads to an overall better mood” (p. 61). For his part, Bandura (1977) considered that “behavior change could and does occur through observation, even when such observation is incidental, occurring in the context of other activities. While this finding seems rather simple, it has significant implications for how we conceptualize learning” (Fryling, Johnston, & Hayes, 2011, para 3). These remarks suggest how students can benefit from observing a professionally attired teacher, among other components of their professional attitude and behavior.

Problem Statement

The professional attire of teachers at the middle-school level in one of the districts in Texas became so informal that it was viewed as a detriment to students' behavior and their opportunities for learning in that school. The school district's professional attire dress code for teachers states that they are expected to be professionally attired daily, because teaching, as a profession, demands setting an example for students. However, within the district's Department of Human Resources, the appropriate level of professional attire of teachers remained a point of controversy. Is there a connection between student achievement and teacher attire, and what perceptions do teachers have on their effectiveness as educators based on their appearance? This study sought to understand how teachers perceive their attire can impact students' achievement.

Conceptual Framework

In a world dominated by multimedia, the probability that people are judged based on snapshots of their appearance is increasing (Howlett, Pine, & Fletcher, 2013). The realm of education is no exception. The 21st-century educational environment is more than a place to teach; it is a miniature community where students and faculty interact, exchange ideas and culture, and influence each other's behavior as well as their capacity for mutual understanding (Okoro & Washington, 2011). Across the country, administrators wonder how they can better regulate what teachers wear without provoking a labor war. However, teachers need to be cognizant that a "good teacher" can and should seek to do whatever is necessary to limit distractions in the classroom, especially if doing so can create a more desirable atmosphere for learning (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, 2009).

Teachers preside over their classroom, ideally, from a position deserving of respect and authority. This position is undermined if a teacher comes to school wearing clothes so informal

that the nonverbal message of what they are wearing is more pronounced than the lesson they are teaching. As Angerosa (2014) puts it, “Clothing is considered an important characteristic of a nonverbal message, which makes it an important feature for communication analysis. It provides a plethora of information about a wearer without having to talk to that person” (p. 4). Clothing has communicative power; whether intentional or not, it announces how a person wishes others to perceive him or her. According to Okoro and Washington (2011), educators create a favorable impression on students or learners by presenting themselves in professional or appropriate attire, thereby enabling their students to view them as authoritative figures deserving of respect.

Weber and Mitchell (1995) asserted that “In dressing, we address ourselves as well as others who are a part of our world” (p. 54). In other words, how individuals clothe themselves is an integral part of their self-identity. It can also help determine how others perceive their character. In other words, though people expect to be judged by their knowledge, personalities, skills, and abilities, it is their mode of dress, often, that influences others’ judgments and reactions towards them—at least initially. Teachers communicate their personal and social values through attire and appearance (Mohammed, 2013). Thus, Wong and Wong (2005) assert that “teachers should dress for four main effects: (a) respect, (b) credibility, (c) acceptance, and (d) authority” (p. 55). They continue by suggesting that respect is essential if optimal learning is to be achieved. Teachers must understand that all the constituents they are addressing, from administrators to students, form observational opinions based upon what they are wearing. Hence, although teachers should have decision-making power about what to wear, they must also understand that their attire sends a powerful message and that lax dress codes can change how the profession is viewed—and make it less respected by stakeholders.

The conceptual framework of this study is rooted in personal experience, literature about attire, and research on nonverbal communication, as well as the social and behavioral learning theories of Bandura (1977), Rotter (1990), and other social theorists. Observing and imitating the actions of other individuals are essential factors emphasized by such social learning theorists. Their work helps explain the continuous interaction between human behaviors, cognitive behaviors, and environmental influences, enabling the researcher to evaluate and extend existing knowledge in this area of research.

Bandura's Social Learning Theory

Bandura's (1977) theories postulate that learning occurs through social interactions and influences from those with whom one comes in contact. It was Bandura's objective to define how children learn in social environments by observing and then duplicating the behavior of others. Bandura's theory held that the learning process in and of itself could not entirely explain reinforcement, but that the presence of others was also an influence. "What people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave. The natural and extrinsic effects of their actions, in turn, determine their thoughts patterns and affective reasons" (Bandura, 1989, p. 25). According to this view, clothing not only impacts others' opinions but also how individuals view themselves.

Teachers should make special note of two elements of this theory. First, the observer will imitate the model's behavior if the model possesses characteristics such as talent, intelligence, power, good looks, or popularity—that is, characteristics that the observer finds attractive or desirable. Second, a distinction can be drawn between an observer's "acquiring" a behavior and "performing" a behavior (Bandura, 1989). Appropriate attire is not the only quality of teacher professionalism; but it can help create an atmosphere for their students' willingness to learn as well as their willingness to focus on a lesson or activity. Bandura (1989) stated that "once

established reputations do not easily change” (p. 240). Consequently, teachers can do irreparable damage to their overall success as educators by not dressing appropriately. Therefore, a teacher’s perception of his or her attire in the middle-school environment is relevant, and Bandura’s and other theorists’ understanding of how social-learning theory frames such perceptions is a vital aspect of this inquiry.

Rotter’s Social Learning Theory

Rotter’s (1990) social learning theory stated that the personality of an individual that has been developed over time would predict how they would react to a given situation. Rotter’s learning theory is an expansion of Bandura’s work on observational learning, as it relates to behavior. However, Rotter (1990) disagreed with the premise that humans were naïve victims of their unconscious. Instead, Rotter argued that people are motivated to seek reinforcement and positive stimulation and avoid unpleasant stimulation. The key emphasis in Rotter’s theory is that personality represents an interaction between the individual and the environment. Thus, to understand behavior, a person’s history of education and experience must be coupled with the stimuli acting on that person in his or her environment. According to Rotter (1990), when the environment is changed, or how individuals think is altered, their behavior changes as well. Rotter argued that people would be drawn toward their goals, seek maximum reinforcement, and avoid punishment.

Other Social Learning Theorists

Bandura’s (1977) social-learning theory illuminated individual behavior in terms of continuous, reciprocal interaction between behavior and environmental influences; but others working in the field have extended the theory of social and behavioral learning in other directions. Bruner and Tagirui (1954), for example, suggested that people infer traits about others

or build mental ideas of expected forms of behavior based on observations of their physical and expressive characteristics. This implicit personality theory suggests individuals tend to form mental constructs concerning expected behavior and personal attributes based on a person's mode of dress (Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Miller (2004) argued that attire could either facilitate or hinder human interaction. In essence, then, clothing has language-like properties. Perspectives from social learning theory can shed light on how these language-like properties are the first nonverbal message that a teacher sends to their students.

Research in this area also confirms that clothing communicates a “code,” which depends on the social location of an individual as well as the social characteristics of the style of clothing involved (Danesi, 2004). In effect, clothes are evaluated through a nonverbal language system and thus considered semiotic. The term *semiotics* refers to the study of signs within society. Understanding how clothing symbolizes or represents an individual is part of the subfield of semiotics sometimes called “clothing semiotics” (Danesi, 2004). According to Barthes (2013), “semiotics provides a non-verbal means of expressing who the wearer is or how they want to be perceived. Semiotics is done by attaching connotations and meanings, to the type of clothing and adornment people wear” (p. 1). Therefore, teachers must understand that although they may not be consciously communicating specific intentions through their attire, signals are still sent by what they wear, and processed by students.

Personal Interest

My career in education began with my role as a trainer for teachers at Head Start, which is a program that promotes the school readiness of children, ages birth to five, from low-income families. Some of my responsibilities were to train teachers at various centers as well as model developmentally appropriate aspects of the education curriculum. We were required to dress

professionally. Professionally dressed meant slacks and a blouse, a suit, or a dress of professional standard. Occasionally, employees were able to wear jeans on Fridays, if the jeans were accompanied by a shirt with a Head Start logo. At all the training sessions, I was considered an authority in the area for which I provided instruction. In Bandura's (1989) terms, through observation, those who attended the sessions may have viewed me as knowledgeable based, at least in part, on my attire. Grossnickle (1981) asserts, "it is possible, through the skillful manipulation of dress in any particular situation, to evoke a favorable response to your personality and your needs" (p. 281). Hence, in any instance where I stand before other people, I use my attire to build up and exude more confidence.

Going into my first year of teaching at the middle-school level, I assumed that most educators dressed more professionally than casually. Therefore, I continued to dress in professional clothing, which, according to Twigg (2009), "maintains and reproduces positions of authority, reinforcing relation of dominance" (p. 2). While a teacher's attire in itself does not affect the abilities of a teacher, the lack of professional attire at a glance may cause preconceived opinions on their capabilities and knowledge of content. In retrospect, dressing in a professional fashion met my needs twofold: I was able to project high self-esteem to students, teachers, and administration, even as my students better maintained their focus in class. My feelings about the matter are supported by the literature. Grosnickle (1981), for example, indicated that students worked longer and harder for the teacher dressed in conservative attire. My principal often called upon me to represent the school, in meetings with parents, school board members, and members of the community.

Eventually, my attire became more relaxed as I assimilated into the professional environment. When dressing casually, there are many occasions where conversations with

students and faculty centered on clothing or other off-task topics, which took time away from learning and achievement. The goal of education is not to discuss what one wears unless students are taking a class in fashion. Furthermore, “Although the actual item of clothing worn by teachers may not determine what or how students learn, they can significantly impact the level of respect that students develop for that individual” (Hadfield, 2016, p. 234). According to Grossnickle (1981), students may “like” their teachers yet not respect them, because they see these teachers as one of their peers. The nonverbal communication that a teacher conveys through his or her clothing is pivotal in this connection. Huang (1998) submits that clothes provide a means by which individuals can communicate and create an impression that results in respect as well as admiration. Huang (2014) noted “that the type of clothing selected can encourage or discourage communication and signal approach or avoidance” (p. 21). The teacher’s ability to communicate and build a relationship with students is essential; it thus vital that clothing should not be a distraction for student success.

Review of the Literature on Teacher Attire

In a progressively diverse country where an individual’s dress is often a form of self-expression, many teachers object to a professional dress code (Ettenheim, 2011). Some educators feel that any constraint on their attire is simply another insulting effort to set rules and lines that infringe upon their freedoms and limit their rights as well as question their professionalism. O’Donnell (2015) stated that the Teachers Union in Cleveland took the position that the dress code was an unreasonable, and that it “deprofessionalized” teachers by making them subject to a checklist of things for which they can be disciplined. The Cleveland Teacher’s Union representative stated that individual campuses should address the problem when, and if, it arises. Teachers filed a petition to keep the checklist from becoming policy.

According to Sharkey (2000), inconsistent results and different viewpoints on the topic of professional attire were reported: “Advocates state that it increases employee morale because it offers more comfort, greater flexibility, and is less costly. Others are less concerned about whether casual dress causes a casual work ethic” (p. 7). However, Morris, Gorham, Cohen, and Huffman (1998) stated that it is challenging, or rather impossible, to wear attire that does not send social signals. Authority positions are differentiated through dress, and clothing is used to distinguish status. In turn, positions involve types of people in a society; for example, teachers, students, principals, superintendents. Once positional labels have been assigned, certain behaviors are expected from the person, and others behave toward the person in ways that are shaped by those expectations. An individual’s behavior in a particular position is constrained by the roles associated with the position.

Graham (2014) recounted how, at one school in West Virginia, teachers were disgruntled about having an enforced dress code imposed upon them. This dress code banned all visible tattoos and face piercings. Teachers were required to dress “modestly” and be neatly groomed. Teachers asserted that they were professionals and did not need to be told what to wear to work (Graham, 2014). However, Tichenor (2005) claimed that it is difficult to separate the character of the individual teacher from the act of teaching. Thus, the decisive success of teachers depends less on what they know and more on their ability to inspire learning.

While current research has assessed students’ perceptions of teacher attire, only a few investigations have made attempts to understand teachers’ own perception of how their attire affects students’ academic success. Sampson (2016) and Keeler (2004) researched the relationship between teacher attire and how teachers perceive their dress impacts student behavior. The qualitative evidence produced by this study showed no connection between

teacher attire and student behavior. However, Sampson (2016) found that teachers perceived professional attire as a positive influence on students' learning as well as their behavior. According to Sampson (2016, p. 3), "A teacher who understands that students can learn some attitudes and behaviors vicariously, should be concerned with every facet of the modeling effect including attire they wear in the classroom" (p. 4). Making changes to school policies may allow teachers to observe how something as minor as a wardrobe change can have positive results in their relationships with students.

There are also studies that provide recommendations to teachers which relied on quantitative data. Okoro and Washington (2011), for example, recommended using formal attire in the diverse classrooms, relying on the previous research of Phillips and Smith (1992). In their investigation, they chose to show pictures to ninth-graders and have them select teachers whom they perceived as knowledgeable and caring; results showed modest effects of instructor attire on student perceptions. Lighthouse, Francis, and Kocum (2011) also used the method of showing students pictures of individuals who were either wearing casual attire or business attire and asking them to provide their opinion on the appropriate attire of the teacher. Results for teacher credibility perceptions indicate that the teachers who wore the most formal attire received the highest perception of credibility.

Likewise, the present study sought to assist in developing a clearer understanding of the effect of teacher attire on student academic behavior. This qualitative study aimed to answer the following research questions:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?

2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

Dunbar and Segrin (2011) stated that “Although nothing can beat teacher preparedness or knowledge, students could perceive a teacher as unorganized, lacking knowledge as well as disciplinary skills based on their lack of professional attire” (p. 1). Likewise, a student cannot learn much by observation if he does not attend to or recognize the essential features of the model’s behavior (Bandura, 1986). For those without pedagogical or classroom-management skills, attire will not make as much impact.

Teachers as Professionals

The need to attain and develop certain standards and benchmark criteria for all professions has increased in today’s competitive work conditions (Demirkasmoglu, 2010). According to Creasy (2015), despite the significant role the concept of professionalism plays in the workplace, there is no universally accepted definition of the term in teacher education programs. Consequently, discussions of professionalism in teaching tend to be vague, since they traffic in general perceptions and cultural or societal ideologies (Sampson, 2016). When the subject is teacher professionalism, the meaning of the term changes as a response to external pressures, public discourse, and developments in educational research, and it can vary from state to state and from district to district. For example, Murray School District, in Utah, has a Code of Ethics not only for professional conduct in general, but also for professional attire. Granite School District, also in Utah, includes items for professional appearance and behavior in its teacher evaluations (Toomer-Cook, 2002). By contrast, teachers in West Virginia’s Kanawha County School District protested an anticipated dress code under consideration by the local school board. This case exemplifies Graham’s (2014) study, in which he discusses how

“Teachers maintain that setting these standards [for dress] devalues the profession and takes the focus off of what is important, which is student achievement” (p. 1). Teachers, however, should view the requirement to be professionally dressed not as punitive, but as a way to set the tone for schools and provide an example for students. Teachers must understand that they are on display every day.

According to Creasy (2015), “Whatever the belief or assumption is about professionalism and the dispositions characteristic of an educational professional, the fact is that professionalism and the acquisition of professional dispositions are believed to be essential” (p. 23). Further, the effective teacher is the one who uses all available resources to ensure student achievement. Whether they are novice or veteran, some teachers may not fully understand what wearing professional attire entails, or for that matter the importance of appearing as a professional. Professional relationships with parents, administrators, and students are critical to making school a place where learning is the focus.

The term “professional dress” can mean many things to different people, depending on how it is defined for a particular career field. According to Gill (2005), the more interaction one has with one’s clients, the more professional the attire should be. In the teaching field, the clients are the students, as are parents, colleagues and administrators, and members of the larger community. Clients are, in short, individuals who are seen daily (Gill, 2005). Gill asserts, “Business casual is the expression that most schools use to describe the level of the professional dress required for their teachers. It is less formal than ‘business’ but dressier than ‘casual’” (p. 15). For this study, business casual was defined in the same way, and it precluded all tattoos, tight-fitting clothing, and all facial jewelry other than earrings of an appropriate length. A similar description of business casual is offered by Workman and Freeburg (2000). In the case of

teachers who work in physical education, the woodshop, behavior units, or other positions that require special attire, school districts should use prudence in determining what kind of dress is appropriate for such teachers in order for them to perform their duties.

The Effect of Attire: Student Perceptions

According to Rubio (2009), students' perceptions, attitudes, and experiences vis-à-vis an effective teacher can vary depending on the individual. "An effective teacher has been considered, sometimes, as a perfectionist, encouraging, approachable and caring, other times as intelligent, but above all, as enthusiastic, funny, clever, effective and understanding, open, and with a relaxed style while teaching" (p. 1). Carr et al. (2009) stated that what teachers do, how they act, and possibly how they look may be as significant as the lessons discussed in the classroom. They also assert that what one wears has communicative power, even as the subject of the meaning of dress has remained the focus of research for decades due to its social significance. In any event, a central hypothesis emerging from the literature is that teachers will be perceived as more knowledgeable and authoritative if they wear professional attire, which thus enables them to have a more positive impact on student behavior in the classroom.

Though many studies highlight the positive impact of professional dress for teachers, other studies suggest that the most effective teacher dress consists of highly casual clothes such as jeans, shirts, and flannel skirts (Morris, Gorham, Cohen, & Huffman, 1996). Furthermore, Carr et al. (2009) found that college students feel more comfortable approaching instructors with questions both inside and outside the classroom, and also while participating in class discussions, when instructors are not professionally attired. Their results also indicated that unprofessional dress has the most positive impact on students' overall attendance for a course, because they feel more relaxed with the professor. However, according to Carr et al. (2009), "students seemed to

appreciate a professionally dressed instructor and more likely to evaluate the course and the instructor more favorable. Students' judgment was also found to be influenced more by how teachers behave than by what they wear" (p. 295). In cases where connections with students and an easy-going demeanor are established, teachers may be able to relate students on a personal level but find that they have lost authority or control over the classroom.

Morris et al. (1998) stated that students working through their perceptions concerning how a teacher is dressed could "waste" as much as 15 minutes of class time each day. They also conducted a study on the impact of teacher attire on student perceptions of teacher competence. The question was raised: "What clothing choices should teachers make to manage their classroom" effectively (p. 28)? Perceptions of attire were tested by showing undergraduate students photographs of four categories of clothing options. The first three categories presented in the study were formal professional, casual professional, and casual. A fourth category, "inappropriate dress," was also used. Researchers used photographs of models with the same body type as examples of instructors who were dressed in clothes in each of these four categories. To exclude the possibility of extraneous variables affecting the results, the heads of the models were not included. The results indicated that student perceptions of instructor competence were stronger in those who were dressed in professional attire as compared with clothes in the other three categories. It should be noted that, apart from their dress styles, each of the instructors used for the experiment were in command of their lecture materials and skilled at presenting it, since problems in those areas could have overridden dress as the most obvious cues affecting impression formation.

In a study that engages with these findings, Sampson (2016) likewise observed that the nonverbal signals that clothing gives off have a strong impact at the elementary and secondary-

school levels. But Sampson (2016) argued that if students feel the teacher is unapproachable, they can become distracted or become a distraction to other students. Philip and Smith (1992) investigated the effect of teacher attire on fourth-, seventh-, and ninth-grade students and found that students' perceptions of teacher attributes are indeed affected by teacher attire. They concluded that teachers who were dressed in jeans and tennis shoes (casual wear) were identified by the students as more likable, friendly, and fair. The moderately casually dressed teachers were rated as organized, understanding, and interesting, while the conservative dressed teacher was rated as organized and knowledgeable in their discipline.

Sampson (2010) examined secondary students' perceptions of teachers' images based on attire and found that students perceived a difference between positive and negative teachers' attire. Most overwhelmingly felt that teachers should not wear clothing considered inappropriate as outlined in a student dress code. The study concludes with a recommendation to query teachers about their own perception of the impact of their attire upon students. The results of a study conducted by Saiki (2006) also revealed that teachers who dressed professionally were perceived by students as being believable, knowledgeable, and qualified. In a culture where schools and classrooms are considered institutions for learning excellent character, professional attire for teachers may influence the level of respect that students have toward teachers (Borba, 2006). Once respect is lost, teachers will find that they must focus more on classroom management and behavior than on teaching and other activities that produce academic success. However, the issue for some teachers may be that clothing in the business casual category is not cost effective or as comfortable as more casual clothing.

The Effect of Teacher Attire: Teachers' Perceptions

Parini (2001) noted that countless messages are sent to students both explicitly and implicitly, all the time:

Students are reading us as closely as they read the texts we assign; they find clues to our attitudes toward the world, even our politics, in the styles we assume, and they often respond in their ways: in their dress, in the manner of their prose on papers, in how they picture the world of academics. It pays to think of clothing as a rhetorical choice and to dress accordingly. (p. 24)

Since the early 1990s, there has been a significant increase in the censuring of teachers for their lack of “professional” dress. There has been relatively little scholarly investigation, however, of why this trend is occurring. Simmons (1996) asserted that teachers need a dress code to keep the profession highly regarded. However, in most cases, teachers’ unions have successfully defeated mandatory dress codes. Malloy (1996) suggested that, often, teachers are not viewed or even paid as professionals because they do not dress as professionals, while Mosca and Buzza (2013) argue that dressing for success establishes respect, credibility, and authority. In the absence of these three factors, it is difficult for teachers to maintain their professional status. According to Wong and Wong (2009), professionally dressed attire should be considered the norm among teachers, just as appropriate manners are widely accepted as preferable to rudeness.

Although teachers’ professional attire is a controversial issue in schools, it has a great effect on a school’s climate and culture (Lemos, 2007). Brownstein (2010) responded to calls for regulating teacher dress and stated that in cases involving such regulations, the Tinker Standard in defending teachers’ right to self-expression is observed. Established in 1969, the Tinker Standard defends not only students’ rights to symbolic speech but also teachers. This standard

argued that teachers do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of expression when they report to work in schools. However, some court decisions have favored school boards and districts in this connection.

The unique circumstances in each case, however, make it impossible to establish any judicial trends or tendencies in rulings of this kind. School culture differs from place to place, so it can be hard to translate policies across geographical borders. In short, “What’s acceptable workplace attire in suburban California isn’t necessarily the same as what communities expect in rural Kentucky or southern Virginia” (Sternberg, 2003, para. 2). Although there are various factors to consider when setting guidelines for attire, such as climate and urban versus rural environments, school boards and districts need to be in control of setting guidelines and standards for teacher attire. Doing so can help offset the vagueness of the very term “professional attire.”

The Effect of Teachers’ Attire on Their Credibility

Carr et al. (2010) stated that a teacher’s credibility benefits both the teacher and the student. They concluded that given the importance of how they are evaluated by students, teachers should be cognizant of factors that theoretically impact students’ sense of their professional credibility. It is essential that teachers recognize that their credibility can be tied to how well their students perform. Although this study suggested that certain instructor-related traits have a significant impact on credibility apart from the attire worn by the instructor, their results revealed some differences in the significance level of those traits depending on how formally or informally the professor was dressed.

Workman and Freeburg (2010) asserted that students learn attitudes and behaviors by observing teachers; therefore, teachers should be concerned about all aspects of their conduct as

well as model appropriate attire in the classroom. Sampson (2016) investigated teachers' perceptions on the effect of their attire on middle school students' behavior and learning and found that an overwhelming majority of teachers were aware of the positive impact that nonverbal messages have on academic achievement. The findings also indicated that teachers see their professional attire as having a positive influence on students' learning and behavior, and that students appear to model teachers who were professionally attired. As Workman and Freeburg put it, "Implications for positive social change include improved awareness at the local site about how teacher attire may influence students" (p. 32). Teachers who do not recognize that their attire has an impact on student focus and academic success can refer to these case studies for evidence suggesting that students' attention is not diverted away from academics by inappropriate teacher attire.

The Effect of Teachers' Attire on Student Behavior

The topic of the impact of teacher attire on students' behavior was examined by Gorham, Cohen, and Morris (1997), who reported on the importance of teachers dressing professionally, especially during the first few weeks of school, and of being cognizant of the impression they make in the classroom. It was found that while attire did not hurt credibility, it did relate to approachability ratings. Although wearing professional attire in the classroom can make some students initially feel intimidated, the teacher as a professional has to be capable of portraying themselves as caring, and not just as authoritative. When students do not feel comfortable approaching a teacher for assistance, their hesitation can lend itself to inappropriate or off-task behavior. According to Philip and Smith (1992), moderately casually as well as conservatively dressed teachers both convey disciplinary skills. However, the conservatively dressed teacher also elicits perceptions of teacher organization, knowledge, and disciplinary skills. The results in

their study showed that most students selected the teacher who had conservative attire as the one who deserves the most respect.

Additionally, Sternberg (2007) stated that “Teachers who exhibit unprofessional conduct might create the perception that neither they nor the material being taught is important” (para. 3). Teachers need to be seen as skilled and dedicated professionals. When teachers are dressed too informally, the discussion can focus on their attire or other things that do not concern academic matters. According to Bandura (2008), behavior alters environmental conditions, by the new conditions it creates. In this sense, if one student is off task in a classroom, the whole learning environment can be compromised. Therefore, appropriate teacher attire in the classroom is a worthwhile recommendation, even if it benefits only one student.

Teacher Attire as a form of Nonverbal Communication

To understand human social behavior, one cannot ignore the crucial role of nonverbal communication signals. As Larson (2014) stated, “Clothes are one of the non-verbal signals which inevitably transmit social signals and clothes are closely related to self-representation. Therefore, they can be used to make the desired impression” (p. 3). Even though an individual may not be engaging in verbal communication, his or her physical appearance and behavior are providing external nonverbal cues. The nonverbal signal of clothing style remains a common variable in the analysis, and researchers investigating the topic have deployed different styles of clothing in order to test what a given style communicates to a perceiver. Angerosa (2014) stated that complex judgments are made in seconds based on appearance. For their part, Adam and Galinsky (2012) introduced the term “enclothed cognition” to describe the systematic influence that clothes have on the wearer’s psychological processes.

Identity and dress are intimately linked. Clothes display, express, and shape identity. Thus Howlett, Pine, Orakçioğlu, and Fletcher (2013) state that what an individual chooses to wear may communicate a complex range of information about them to others, even though they may not be consciously trying to transfer any sort of nonverbal message. Clothing, in short, conveys a vast amount of meaning. Angerosa (2014) stated that “people are said to use person perception by relying on externally available information, rather than solely inner representational resources” (para 5). Person perception, in this context, refers to how individuals make inferences about others based on their clothing. However, the perceiver’s own characteristics and tendencies will also shape how he or she views others, with the result that some students may not form an opinion of teachers based on attire. But even if that is the case, since benefits are conferred on other students by teachers who dress professionally, it is advisable for teachers to wear appropriate dress in the classroom.

The professional attire and appearance of teachers are vital features in schools and society. Due to the different sets of values held by administrators as well as the constant change in school and community cultures, clothing guidelines for teachers remain unclear. Nonetheless, according to Weber and Mitchell (1995), clothing assists in creating a working atmosphere as well as commanding respect and order in the classroom. Professional attire is, in this sense, a pedagogical strategy. Teachers want to be perceived as professionals. As has been established in this review of the research on the topic, the perception of teachers’ professionalism by others, including students, administrators, other teachers, and members of the larger community, may be negatively impacted by inappropriate attire.

Although research has shown that teachers understand the impact that their attire has on students, the question remains: will those who dress casually, once they know about the

implications of their attire, elect to modify it? Bickman (1974) asserted that a person's style of attire functions as a principal determinant of others' reactions to the wearer. Clothing cues make it possible for strangers to categorize an individual's status in society, and to respond to that individual appropriately. It sets the tone. For these reasons, if teachers' awareness of the effect their attire has on students can be enhanced by studies like the present one, this research will help them establish more productive learning environments for all.

Review of Key Methodological Issues in the Study of Teacher Attire

As part of my literature review, I explored, furthermore, some of the general, methodological challenges and issues facing researchers who seek to investigate teachers' perception of how their attire impacts middle school students. I performed literature searches using a variety of databases. Most of the searches were conducted using Concordia University's EBSCOhost database as well as the ProQuest database. I cross-referenced the articles to yield studies correlated with the topic. However, some of the relevant issues, such as nonverbal communication and clothing as semiotics, were not addressed in the primary research. Several of the studies discovered through the literature review used a mixed method featuring both quantitative analysis and a survey or questionnaire as the main instrument for collecting the primary data. I found this kind of research set-up to be highly relevant for the current study, when it came to selecting the most appropriate research design for this investigation.

Qualitative Methods

Although many of the studies I reviewed employed a quantitative method of research, using qualitative methods can be fruitful in situations where the goal is to explore the state of the practice or the human aspects of education (Stojanov & Dobrilovic, 2011), and where the analysis is to be based on a relatively small sample size. According to Stojanov and Dobrilovic

(2011), while these studies can offer a kind of richness and suggest the plausibility of formal models, they provide little leverage in assessing general relationships. But by combining qualitative research with quantitative methods, more general patterns in the data can be studied. Therefore, using a mixed method to enhance the surveys would give more credence to the research in this area.

Quantitative Methods

The broad comparisons required to evaluate the generality of hypothesized relationships demand some form of quantitative analysis. Brownstein (2010) asserted that data gathered from collecting surveys and questionnaires are suitable for this purpose. However, they overlook issues of self-presentation in a given context. Respondents may also have trouble grasping the meaning of some questions that seem clear to the researcher. The use of a survey that involves a large sample helps strengthen the validity and reliability of the findings. Granted, there are other forms of inquiry that can be used to address research questions like the ones guiding the present study. Dunbar and Segrin (2011) implemented an experimental study by allowing two instructors to read lectures in attire that can be considered “inappropriate” for a teacher. The study is low in internal and external validity, however, since only two instances cannot prove a hypothesis. Although Dunbar and Segrin (2011) used pilot testing and involved 240 participants in their research in a university setting, the results are not generalizable. Though there was a large sample size, only two graduate-level instructors were used in the study. The reliability of the data is thus excessively dependent on the quality of the subjects who were used in the sample. Furthermore, a study of this sort conducted with students at the middle-school level might produce different results, given their relative lack of maturity. As these remarks suggest, to strengthen the validity of the research, a form of interview or open-ended questionnaire needed

to be part of the study; this technique provided more generalizable data than research using only two instructors in one setting, such as at one university or school.

In another study conducted by Lighthouse, Francis, and Kocum (2011), 362 accounting students and psychology students in their second year were used as the target population. The psychology department has a database of surveys that students could complete for bonus marks in their psychology classes, and all other participants who completed the survey were given a similar small reward for their participation. However, allowing students to benefit from completing a survey could inadvertently skew the data. A smaller sample could have been utilized, limited to students who were willing to volunteer their time to take a survey. Indeed, in Lighthouse, Francis, and Kocum (2011)'s study, the population of the psychology students was indeterminate, because they chose which surveys to complete from a database. The possibility of a single student participating in a given study twice was also a factor—once as a student taking a psychology course, and then again while taking a business course. All the issues just mentioned do not automatically make this study invalid. However, the issues do call into question the reliability of the investigation. Given these factors, it can be concluded that extraneous variables in this research would make Lighthouse, Francis, and Kocum's (2011) investigation difficult to replicate.

Mixed Methods

“Mixed method research involves the mixing of quantitative and qualitative methods or paradigm characteristics into research studies” (Onwuegbuzie & Johnson, 2004, p. 51). Sampson (2016), in using such mixed methods, implemented a semistructured interview that allows the researcher to change the questions or topics of the interview if the participants raise an important issue. If that happens, however, it is possible to create unnecessary complications for the inquiry

by adding too much information unrelated to the initial objective of the research. Tichenor (2005) used a similar strategy by interviewing teachers as the main method of data collection. By using the focus group interview, the researcher was able to generate effective and reliable information. However, many interview-based studies tend to produce a small sample that can hinder objectivity. Therefore, the triangulation of research methods or the use of mixed methods of research can assist in sustaining the reliability and credibility of a study.

Weber and Mitchell (1995) and Wong and Wong (2009) both produced substantial studies centering on the question of teachers' attire vis-à-vis issues of professionalism. The authors used a qualitative methodology and their own judgment as to arrive at their findings. This approach limits the relevance of their studies for the current investigation; however, their work can be used as supplementary or secondary research for the current study. Indeed, the limitations of their studies should assist in providing a route for future investigations in the area of teacher attire. More generally, one can use data-gathering methods usually associated with qualitative or quantitative approaches, or combine techniques from both methods.

Synthesis of Research Findings

In reviewing the studies relevant for this investigation, it can be noted that most of the studies are quantitative. However, there were several that also used a mixed method of inquiry. The most common instrument that was used for research on teacher attire was an interview or questionnaire. The researchers in most of the studies sought to determine the effect of teachers' attire based on the perceptions of the teachers or the students.

This study is informed by the way different standards for teacher dress are applied in different institutions as well as different states. In engaging with this issue, the research takes into account the cultural and social atmosphere that teachers and students are a part of

(Angerosa, 2014). Thus, the study seeks to alleviate the controversies and confusions that arise by factoring in past studies on the subject, but it also enriches those studies by providing teacher input as part of the research. Although there is not much research in the area of a teachers' perceptions of the impact of their attire on student success, in the literature reviewed there are roughly as many studies suggesting significant effects of teacher attire on student academic achievement as there are studies refuting this finding. For example, Sampson (2016) found no relationship between the teachers' attire and the students' behaviors. However, Workman and Freeman (2010) identified a positive relationship between attire and personal mood and a general sense of self-confidence. At the same time, although the ability of teachers to have a positive impact on student academic achievement via modes of dress deserves urgent attention, this is a delicate issue given teacher labor unions' resistance to general rules about attire (Ettenheim, 2011). In short, whereas many scholars think that teachers' attire does have an impact on students, others insist that it is not one's attire but rather the lesson that counts.

Critique of Previous Findings

Previous investigations were limited by the choice of research instruments as well as the selection of participants. In some studies, the researchers used photographs featuring categories of teacher attire. Rollman (1980), Morris, Gorham, Cohen and Huffman (1998), and Workman and Freeburg (2010) used these pictures to study the different effects attire had on students. More research on students' perception of teachers' attire and their ideas about whether it affects their learning is needed. Most of the previous studies neglected to consider how other factors, besides teacher attire, distract students during their middle school years. For example, Sampson's (2016) study fails to take into account how students are distracted by a range of factors, including the struggle to establish an identity, adolescence, and other issues they face. In line with this, it is

crucial to try to identify the proportional impacts that are brought about by teacher attire on student behavior, in contrast with other factors. While other researcher's and theorist such as Carr, Davies, and Lavin (2009) as well as Butler and Roesel (1989) investigated students at the college level using similar methods, their focus was predominately on the student's perception of professor knowledge based on attire.

Summary of the Literature Review

Teaching practices and procedures are guided by preset standards that regulate the education sector (Earthman & Lemasters, 2009). Most of these standards are stated firmly in the code of conduct or the teacher handbook. However, due to loosely stated standards for the professional attire of teachers, research on teacher dress is critically important for scholars and other stakeholders. The literature review confirms the need to investigate to what extent teachers' attire impacts student achievement and to explore whether stricter standards need to be set. The present study examines teacher perception of their attire and their understanding of how it encourages or discourages student behavior; for a more complete understanding of the issues involved, other complex factors that relate to student behavior must also be addressed.

This review focused on previous studies relevant for research on the perceptions that teachers have about their attire at the middle school where this research was conducted. The literature reviewed touched on the role of clothing vis-à-vis nonverbal communication between the teacher and the students, as well as how this form of communication influences academic achievement. Limitations as well as strengths of the available research were assessed, with the aim of establishing foundations for the current study.

Chapter 3: Methodology

According to Stiegelbauer (1992), one of the most demanding and rewarding careers is that of a teacher. Regarding teachers, he stated, “These are the individuals who have selected to dedicate themselves to the service of others, at a time when the teaching profession is under attack seemingly at every corner” (p. 35). To thrive, a teacher needs to be consciously thinking about the practical problems they face, how to interpret these problems, and what decisions need to be made based on their interpretations. This consciousness ensures that they can understand the aspects of teaching that are challenging to them and their students and can thus adjust according to the circumstances (Stiegelbauer, 1992). One area where they may be able to make relatively simple adjustments involves the type of attire the teachers wear as they teach their students. Unprofessional attire is prevalent at the middle school level, where casually adorned teachers aim to interact with their students. According to Sampson (2016), this influences the performance of the students, who feel free to interact with their teachers and their lesson on a casual basis as well.

The theoretical underpinnings of Bandura’s (1989) investigations into social learning are based on the reciprocal interaction between behavioral and environmental influences. Individuals have progressed through observational learning that enables them to expand their knowledge and skills based on information conveyed by modeling influences. According to Bandura (1986), most learning results from direct experience and occurs vicariously by observing people’s behavior and its consequences for them—that is, through social learning. However, a great deal of information about behavior patterns and the effects they have on the environment is gained when learners study models, whose behavior thereby becomes symbolic.

The central issue in this study concerns teachers' perceptions of the effect their attire has on students and their response to that perception (Sampson, 2016). Therefore, using social theory and other frameworks for investigating how teachers' attire influences the performance of students, the investigation focuses on the interactions among teachers, students, and their environments, as well as the reciprocal effects they have on each other. This study used the social theory of Bandura (1989) to investigate how the attire of teachers affects the behaviors of students and ultimately their performance. A qualitative approach generated explanations and theoretical insight through a case study, producing a thick description that was appropriate for this study. The dissertation thus builds theory through case-based research, a method advocated by Eisenhardt (1989).

The present chapter describes the research design used for the study. This design includes the methodology, study participants, procedures, and method of analysis, and ethical concerns raised by the design also need to be addressed. In short, the dissertation uses a case-study approach with the aim of developing theoretical foundations for studying other, more or less similar cases.

Purpose and Design of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to investigate teachers' perceptions regarding the effect of their attire on the behavior and the learning of students in 6th–8th grade at a suburban middle school in Texas. Yin (2014) stated that a single-case study could be warranted if there is a belief or assumption that the problems discovered in a case are common to others as well. Through an in-depth case study, the researcher can have extensive engagement with the participants in their setting—in the present instance, in order investigate the effect of teacher attire on students. The principal objective was to provide insight into teachers' responses to

questions about how they perceive the effects of their attire on student academic achievement. Sankar, Golin, Simoni, Lubroksky, and Pearson (2006) also noted that “case studies are essential for understanding values, motives, beliefs, and relations that are important to making significant contributions to the knowledge base” (p. 20). Therefore, the case study was an appropriate methodology for this investigation.

Creswell (2014) described the quantitative method as an approach to testing theories by examining the relationship between variables, and the literature related to teacher attire is rife with quantitative approaches. Roach (1997) applied a quantitative questionnaire, in which he employed a Likert-type Scale system. A study that can be primarily considered a non-experimental quantitative investigation was used by Keeler (2002). A correlation-based research design was used to analyze the data generated by surveys and determine whether a statistically significant relationship exists between teacher attire and teacher ratings of the quality of student behavior. Other researchers, including Carr, Davies, and Lavin (2009), also applied a quantitative questionnaire or survey as their research instrument. In those studies, the researchers based their investigation on student perceptions of a teacher’s attire instead of the teacher’s perception. There is a dearth of qualitative studies that examine teacher perceptions in this context. A qualitative study allows for an investigation that focuses on social interaction in a natural setting, and that permits participants to make sense of and relate their lived experience.

The primary method of investigation used in any study is determined by the worldview to which the researcher subscribes. The philosophical assumptions underpinning this research were based on the social constructivist worldview. Creswell (2014) noted that the goal of the researcher who subscribes to the constructivist worldview is to rely on participants’ understandings of a situation as much as possible. He asserted that individuals develop subjective

meanings of their experiences, meanings directed toward certain objects or things. Based on the constructivist approach, objectivity is a characteristic that should reside in all scientists (Trochim, 2006). However, Patton (2014) argued that multiple sources of evidence and different kinds of data should be used to improve the quality of research findings. In the present study, interviews informed the researcher's preliminary understanding of the concerns related to teacher attire. They also corroborated the assertion that a teacher's attire can be problematic to the point where it can have an impact on student behavior.

Research Questions

According to Tichenor (2005), behaviors exhibited by a teacher are what identify a teacher's degree of professionalism, and this statement also applies to their appearance. A review of the research in this area has established that teachers' lack of professionalism, with respect to attire, can hinder the academic achievement of students. However, according to Sampson (2016), existing research in this area of investigation is insufficient. Accordingly, the present study sought to gain insight into whether teachers' awareness of the impact their attire has on students will provoke in them a desire to change in order to have a positive effect on student behavior. As stated previously, the following two research questions guided this investigation:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?
2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

Target Population, Sampling Method, and Related Procedures

The target population was taken from one of the 114 middle schools in Texas. Ninety-five percent of the students who attend the middle school are Hispanic. Permission from the

Institutional Review Board at Concordia University-Portland was granted to initiate research. Next, authorization was given by the school district and administrators at the research site. Participants were recruited through the existing professional networks of the researcher. Participation was entirely voluntary, and prospective participants were informed about the nature of the study before asked to participate. There are approximately 80 teachers on the campus, of whom 16 were recruited from grades sixth through eighth to form a suitable sample of respondents for the study. Teachers were of any gender and had completed a minimum of three years of teaching. The reason for selecting at least third-year teachers is that teachers by this stage have a broader store of reflections on their experiences from which to draw. The selection process that was employed is known as purposive sampling, in which personal judgment is required to choose cases that assist in answering the research questions and achieve research objectives (Trochim, 2006).

A subcategory of purposive sampling, homogenous sampling, was the procedure utilized for this investigation. Patton (2002) asserts that homogenous samples can facilitate meaningful comparisons across studies. This type of selection is a sample whose units (e.g., people, cases, etc.) share the same or similar attributes or traits such as a group of people that are similar in terms of age, gender, background, occupation, etc. (Patton 2002). It is particularly suitable for participatory syntheses in which the researcher, along with practitioners, is performing a study of a phenomenon that has direct implications for their practice. This research focused on the phenomenon of teachers' attire and the effect it has on the performance of students. A preliminary e-mail inquiry was used to contact teachers; it described the opportunity to be a part of the study. Those who volunteered to be participants were given further information: requirements of the study, the procedures to be used, the expectations of the researcher, and what

the entire study entailed. Meetings were scheduled based on the availability of the selected participants, to provide further details about the nature of the study. Prospective participants were also provided with information considered by the IRB to constitute the basic elements of informed consent. The information consisted of descriptions of research procedures and activities, as well as reasonably foreseeable risks and benefits associated with participation in the study.

Instrumentation

A case study approach was selected based on its practicality and relevance for this study. Yin (2014) stated that a case study is a kind of qualitative work that investigates a contextualized, contemporary phenomenon within a specified boundary. Merriam (1998) presented examples of a bounded phenomenon in education as “a program, an event, a person, a process, an institution, or a social group” (p.13). The characteristics of case-study research include examining a particular subject bounded in time and space, providing a detailed description of contextual material about the case setting, gathering extensive content material from multiple sources to provide an in-depth picture of the case, and using the researcher himself or herself as an instrument of data collection (Creswell, 1998).

According to Kajornboon (2004), “Interviews are ways for participants to get involved and talk about their views” (p. 25). He also stated that the interviewees can discuss their perception and interpretation regarding a given situation (p. 25). The interview is also a relational interaction that is positioned in a specific, mostly face-to-face context as well as a specific time. In this situation, the interviewer and the interviewee assume particular roles, and they alternate between the role of the actor and observer, or speaker and listener (DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). A semistructured interview includes several planned questions (see Appendix D).

However, the interviewer has more freedom to modify the wording and order of questions than in a structured interview (see Appendix E). Through the semistructured interview method of data collection, information for this investigation was gathered with more flexibility to expand on the interviewee's initial responses.

Direct Observation

According to Kawulich (2005), observations enable a researcher to describe existing situations using the five senses. Participation observation allows the researcher the opportunity to learn more about the activities of the people under the study in a natural setting, by observing and participating in those activities. For this study, the participants made observations in their classrooms as well as their interaction with their students, varying their attire on two occasions and noting the effect it had on their students (see Appendix E). The researcher was also able to make observations in some of the participants' classrooms as well. Because the researcher is also a teacher, her background afforded a certain amount of impression management needed to establish a rapport within the community of teachers as well as students. The participants were able to trust the researcher, so they could act naturally and not exaggerate or pretend about their interactions and behaviors. This type of observation is also characterized by interactions based on an open, nonjudgmental attitude (Kawulich, 2005). The teachers were able to participate openly and not hide any of their actions or behaviors in their classrooms.

Interview Protocol

Sampson (2016) also used the case study methodology to interact with participants via a semistructured interview. This process was completed by conducting interviews with the participants based on the research and discussing information related to the case study. In the present study, semistructured interview appointments were made via email with each teacher

who participated in the research. A clear description of the purpose of the interview and detailed information about how the study would be used was provided. There was also an assurance of confidentiality. The interviews themselves took place in the library media room, and a 1-hour meeting was set up for each participant.

Kuzmanic (2009) stated that a researcher is not seeking to capture the reality of occurrences per se. Instead, the aim is to understand what and how the interviewee is experiencing, based on the ways he or she conveys her experiences to the interviewer. Hence, although the questions were predetermined in the semistructured interview, the order could be modified based on what seemed most appropriate. Questions or wording could also be changed, and explanations given; inappropriate questions for a particular interviewee could be omitted, or additional ones included. In all, a set of four questions were used to guide opportunities for participants to reflect.

Questions used in Sampson's (2016) research formed the basis of this investigation as well, with the aim of determining whether the questions yielded comparable results. However, follow-up questions were asked as well, including questions such as:

- Q₁: What is your description of professional attire for teachers?
- Q₂: What do you think your professional attire says about you as an educator?
- Q₃: In what ways do you feel your professional attire influences students' behavior in middle school?
- Q₄: In what ways do you feel your professional attire influences students' learning in school?

Triangulation

Triangulation was employed to assure the validity of research as well as capture a different dimension of this study. Yin (2014) stated that “a case study should take place in the natural setting” (p. 110). Case studies need not be limited to a single form of evidence. Instead, a case study approach was preferred in this study because it allowed for in-depth analysis of the beliefs, attitudes, and practices of the teachers and their students depending on their attire in school. Therefore, much emphasis was placed on the teachers’ opinions, with the aim of ensuring that the results were valid and reliable. The requirements of triangulation were met in this research by not only conducting face-to-face interviews, but also allowing participants to log their observation days on a flash drive. Participants were also asked to review their interview transcripts to check for discrepancies. In this way, inadequacies found in one-source data could be minimized, by using multiple sources to confirm the data in question.

Data Collection and Data Analysis

The data-collection process involved both interviews and observations. Federal regulations state that researchers cannot collect data before an IRB approves the collection process (Student Research Guide, 2017). Therefore, the data-collection procedure was initiated after obtaining approval from Concordia University–Portland’s IRB, district-level approval, and the middle school principal to conduct this research.

Observation

An observation protocol was developed to identify events observed (see Appendix E). Each participant was given a flash drive with the observation protocol form attached. Detailed notes were taken by the participants, and observations were recorded as part of this protocol with the date, time, and setting recorded for each observation. All observations took place during

September 2018, during the school day, and in each participating teacher's classroom. Two observations were made by each participant, with all the observations being 52 minutes in length. The researcher did not participate in discussions or activities during the observation periods. The participating teachers' logs were designed to provide sufficient information about the interactions between the teachers and their students on those specific days. Teachers were asked to log in their professional attire worn for each experimental day, along with student reactions to and interactions with the teachers on that day. Creating these opportunities for participant observations provided more data points to be used for this investigation.

Interviews

Jamshed (2014) asserted that making optimal use of interview time requires the creation of interview guides that assist with the systematic and comprehensive exploration of respondents while also keeping the interview focused on the desired line of action. Interview protocols were developed that focused on attaining the best information from the participants vis-à-vis my case study topic (see Appendix D). These protocols guided the semistructured line of inquiry and assisted in building a rapport with the participants. A one-hour time frame was allotted for each interview.

To ensure privacy and eliminate interruptions, the interviews were conducted in the school library's media room on the campus of the middle school. Each interview was conducted independently, and audio recorded in its entirety to ensure the accuracy of my analysis of the participants' verbal responses to the interview questions. To be able to capture the interview data more effectively, recording the interviews was considered an appropriate choice. The recording of the interview made it easier for the researcher to focus on the content of the interview and the verbal prompts, enabling the analyst-transcriptionist to generate a precise record of the interview

(Jamshed, 2014). The data were organized around the research questions and transcribed with a recurring process of listening to the audio recordings and reading the interview responses to find linkages to the research questions. Every attempt was made to ensure questions were asked in an objective, unbiased manner.

Attributes

All relevant attributes of the teachers were noted and described in order to remove ambiguity. The setting for this investigation was a Title I public school, where all students receive free lunch. For this study, a teacher is defined as one who holds a degree and certification or licenses to teach. Middle school is defined as grade levels 6–8. Teacher attire was divided into two categories, as described by Dunbar and Segrin (2012):

1. Formally dressed teachers: “Male teachers—dress shirt with tie, sport jacket, dress slacks, and leather dress shoes. Female teacher—business suit (with skirt or slacks), and dress shoes” (para. 5).
2. Casually dressed instructor: “Male or female teacher collarless T-shirt (worn out rather than tucked in), denim blue jeans, and running shoes, or open-toed sandals (para. 5)

These two categories were used in conjunction with research on what constitutes professional attire and what is considered appropriate attire.

Data Analysis Procedures

The data generated for this analysis originated from the participants, who were selected for the study to see if the educators’ shared a similar view regarding teacher attire. The data analyzed was thus inductive in nature. Bhattacharjee (2012) discusses how to manage, analyze, and interpret data for the study of social phenomena. Bhattacharjee stated that “in the validation

phase, theories are tested using a scientific method through a process of data collection and analysis, and in doing so, [researchers may] possibly modify or extend [their] initial theory” (p. 20). Qualitative research furthermore requires flexibility during the analysis phase, with procedures sometimes developing in response to the ongoing analysis (Bhattacharjee, 2012). Similarly, Elliot and Tumlak (2005) stated that protocols for qualitative analysis are likely to change in response to the ongoing analysis and emerging results.

Data were analyzed following the steps outlined by Rubin and Rubin (2005) for Responsive Interviewing: (a) Recognition: finding the concepts, themes, events, and topical markers in interviews; (b) Clarify and Synthesize: through systematic examination of the different interviews to begin understanding of the overall narrative; (c) Elaboration: generating new concepts and ideas after clarification and synthesis; (d) Coding: systematically labeling concepts, themes, events, and topical markers, giving them a brief label to designate each and then marking in the interview text where they are found; and (e) Sort: sorting the data units and ranking them and building relationships toward a theory.

After I transcribed the data from the interviews, it was necessary to sift through these data to obtain the basic information. According to Saldaña (2009), open coding focuses predominantly on defining concepts and categories. Once the data were transcribed, they were then processed to reflect the overall concepts and ideas of the participants and the emphases with which those ideas were expressed. I started pre-coding the data, which involved noting any raw data that could be transcribed as elements of larger themes. The study concluded with an analysis that drew on the approaches discussed in the literature review as well as my own theoretical framework to interpret the results present research.

Limitations and Delimitations of the Research Design

Limitations and delimitations are conditions or circumstances that may affect or restrict a study. Simon and Goes (2013) noted, for example, that “We cannot make causal inferences from case studies, because we cannot rule out alternative explanations” (p. 2). Analysis, self-reporting, instrumentation, sampling, time constraints are all examples of limitations in this sense.

Delimitations are those attributes of the research that stem from limitations in the scope of the study (Simon & Goes, 2013).

Limitations

There are several limitations inherent to this qualitative study. For instance, participants were free to leave the study at any time, even though without a certain number of participants the validity of the study might have been placed in jeopardy. Furthermore, this study was limited to one school at the middle school level; it did not address elementary or high school classroom environments because the main focus was on the performance of middle school students vis-à-vis the influence of their teachers’ attire. This investigation was also limited to one county in the southern United States, and the results are representative of only that area with a focus on public schools only.

Delimitations

The study was restricted to 6th-, 7th, and 8th-grade teachers at a suburban middle school in Texas. The participants were purposefully selected based on prior interactions and experience with students at this level. All of the teachers who were selected received an email request to participate and attended a meeting to discuss the study. The school was chosen as the study site due to accessibility. Due to district restrictions, the study did not attempt to measure the students’ perceptions regarding teacher attire; it sought only to identify the behavioral response of the

students (as recorded by the teacher) to the two alternate forms of dress. The researcher was aware of how she could inadvertently influence the person she was interviewing.

Internal Validity

According to Merriam (1995), internal validity refers to how congruent one's findings are with the study. It evaluates the approximate notion of reality that underpins a given study.

“Qualitative research assumes that reality is constructed, multidimensional, and ever-changing; there is no such thing as a single immutable reality waiting to be observed or measured”

(Merriam, 1995, p. 54). Participant reactivity, which bears on questions of internal validity, occurs when the way that participants behave in an experiment is different from the way they would normally act. When the teachers pretend or exaggerate in their actions and interactions with their students, the internal validity of the study will be affected and thus be biased.

Observing the participants in their natural environment over some time can provide a less staged setting for the research, reducing the chances for such reactivity. Also, in-depth transcripts were analyzed, and member checking was used to allow participants to verify their own words.

Themes were also developed from the participant's direct responses.

External Validity

According to Merriam (1995), the extent to which findings from an investigation can be applied to other situations is determined by the participants and situations involved. Participation in this research was strictly voluntarily. The sample studied is not perfectly representative of the target population because it covers only the public schools; thus, information about private schools was not factored in. The methodology of the study provided a thick, rich description of participants, the setting, the instruments used, and how the data were analyzed. This descriptive narrative leads to increased opportunities for transferable results. After the interviews were

transcribed for correctness, member checking was conducted by giving participants the opportunity to read their transcripts in order to prevent errors or inconsistencies. Member checking is defined as a quality control process by which a researcher seeks to improve the accuracy, credibility, and validity of what was recorded during a research interview (Harper & Cole, 2012). Different types of data were collected, including interviews, document reviews, and observational data. All these data provided a deeper insight into the experiences of each participant. When the study can be repeated multiple times, and the same results acquired, validity is can be achieved, so further testing of the research tools and modes of analysis used for this study is needed.

Credibility

One barrier to credible qualitative findings stems from the suspicion that the analyst has shaped findings according to his or her predispositions and biases (Patton, 2014). Research has shown that many factors affect a student's academic performance (Joseph, 2017). Those elements are documented in the literature review section of this study to ensure that all of the issues were considered in the investigation. Providing multiple sources, triangulated data, and member checking brings credibility to this research, since it offers evidence of the information and factors investigated. Moreover, throughout the collection process, the data were verified to certify the thoroughness of each participant observation and its analysis.

Dependability

Dependability is associated with the consistency of findings and the ability to replicate the results of a study (Houghton, 2013). To enhance the dependability of the present study, the specific ways in which data were gathered, analyzed, and interpreted are described. This description will give other researchers the ability to follow, audit, and critique the research

process. Detailed coverage of the methods employed enables the reader to assess the extent to which appropriate research practices have been followed (Houghton, 2013).

Expected Findings

Sampson (2016) also used a qualitative design to study teachers' perception of the effects of their attire on middle school students' behavior and learning. The results of this investigation indicated that teachers are aware that their attire can affect a student's behavior negatively. The teachers included in this study perceived that there was a positive influence of professional attire on the learning and behavior of students. Moreover, the students seemed to model their behavior after that of the teachers who wore professional attire. As noted in the literature review, past investigations in this area of research have employed both qualitative and quantitative methodology, with Keeler (2002), Carr, Davies, and Levin (2009, 2010), and Dunbar and Segrin (2011) all using images of professionally dressed and casually dressed individuals, instead of the actual teacher participants used in the present study. The results of these previous studies suggested that the teacher's dress style does significantly affect student perception. Hence, because of the overall similarity of research design (excepting the use of photographed vs. actual teachers), the expected findings of the present study were that teachers need to strive to have at least moderately formal styles of clothing.

After the data were collected, further expected findings were that some teachers would adhere to the view that the emphasis should remain on lesson planning and instructional skill when it comes to student achievement, rather than on professional attire. It was also expected, however, that those who saw a positive impact from their professional attire on student behavior would be more cognizant of the effect of their clothing. Therefore, it was expected that the teachers would aim for at least a moderately professional attire, given the possible adverse

consequences of casual clothing for the performance of the students. In this way, the students could be positively influenced, and there would be good impressions of the teachers based on the high value placed on them by their students.

Conflict of Interest Assessment

Conflict of interest in research exists when a researcher has an interest or stake in the outcome of the research that may lead to a personal advantage and that therefore, in actuality or appearance, may compromise the integrity of the research in question (National Research Council, 2002). Conflict of interest can be reduced by checking with the participants about their social, political, or religious beliefs, which can sometimes be undisclosed sources of bias in research. This study did not present any conflict of interest for this researcher or for the cooperating school. Permission was obtained from the district leadership before the start of the research. However, during the 2016–2017 school year, the researcher was an ELA teacher, department chair, and National Junior Honor Sponsor at the middle school in which the research was conducted. Therefore, it was crucial that all ethical standards were adhered to as strictly as possible, in order to preserve the integrity and validity of the investigation.

Researcher's Role

The term positionality describes both an individual's worldview and the position they have chosen to adopt while undertaking a specific research task (Denzin, 1986). As a middle-aged teacher, growing up in an era where most female teachers wore dresses with stockings and male teachers wore slacks and a tie (and the occasional blazer), I subscribe to the adage that individuals should dress for success. However, I have learned how to balance between professional attire that allows me to be seen as an authority figure and clothing that departs slightly from this standard, which I call professional casual. Such professional casual attire also

has the same goal of creating positive student behavior and student academic achievement, where the focus is on the student and not what I am wearing.

Ethical Issues in the Study

Sanjari, Bahramnezhad, Fomani, Shoghi, and Cheraghi (2014) asserted that due to the nature of qualitative studies, the interaction between researchers and participants can be ethically challenging, since both parties are personally involved in the study. Therefore, the formulation of specific ethical guidelines for the study was essential to ensure its quality and reliability.

Participation in this study was voluntary, and a consent form was also provided for all participants. Participants did not receive any monetary rewards for their participation, or promises of any favors. All interviews were audio recorded to prevent any biases or self-interpretations of the data. Participants were informed that they would be recorded, so as to give the research a higher level of reliability. With a full understanding of the implications of research ethics in any investigation of this kind, the researcher made certain that all the participants had provided informed consent during the data collection process. The IRB ensured that all participants gave their consent to participate in the study, and the research was commissioned and conducted with respect for all individuals in the study.

Along these lines, a critical ethical concern was that the researcher respected the confidentiality and privacy of the participants. Confidentiality was accomplished by assuring participant anonymity. All contact with the participants was kept confidential, and initial contact came through phone calls or text messages. The names of the teachers and the schools that were involved will not be published in any documentation related to the study. Numbers were used in place of names, to distinguish participants from each other.

Moreover, the researcher did not compel the participants to participate in this study; instead, they had the opportunity to withdraw from the study at any time, which ensured voluntary participation. Additionally, the actual raw data collected through the transcription of the interviews were protected through a strong password, such that only the researcher had access to this data. The original data will be provided to the supervisory panel only upon request.

Summary

This chapter outlined the methods of research used to address the research questions of this study. A discussion of the study design, participants in the study, data collection, and interview questions detailed how the study was carried out. The study sought to explore teachers' perceptions of the effect their attire has on middle school students. All study participants contributed to the theory being developed by sharing their experiences in the interviews as well as their classroom observations, as they provided their perspectives on how their attire affects students' academic performance as well as their behavior. Although it was limited to 6th–8th grade certified teachers at a suburban school in Texas, the approach developed for this study can be used in similar inquiries focusing on other aspects of this research topic. The next chapter documents the data that were collected with a view to answering the research questions for the study. Chapter 5 then presents the study results while also demonstrating that the methodology described in Chapter 3 was followed.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Results

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore teachers' perceptions of the effect their attire has on middle school students by gathering rich descriptive data on this topic. Data were analyzed placed into generative themes, which will be described individually. This chapter includes a discussion of the analysis conducted and is consistent with a qualitative methodology. It will also show the results of the findings and how they are linked back to the research questions.

While much of the research in this area has focused mainly on the perception of teachers' attire at the secondary and college level, middle schools have been left largely unexamined (Sampson, 2016). The existing research at the middle school level supports the idea that a teacher's attire can affect a student's behavior (Joseph, 2017; Harbin, 2018; Penny & Lord, 1992; Sampson, 2016). Furthermore, the studies discussed in the literature review supported the conceptual framework for this case study. This study sought to close a gap in the literature by exploring, at the middle school level, the perception of teachers vis-à-vis their attire. To this end, the following research questions informed this study:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?
2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

The researcher's role in this case study was to analyze the data and draw conclusions in a logical and unbiased manner. This chapter describes the study sample, data analysis, and results, as well as the study's findings regarding teachers' perceptions of classroom attire and its effects on learning environments.

Description of the Sample

The population of this study consisted of a group of teachers selected from the teaching staff at a Title I middle school located in the southern United States, where over 95% of the student population is Hispanic. The school is one of three other middle schools and one high school in the district. This middle school consists of 6th through 8th grade students and has a total enrollment of approximately 600 students and 40 teachers (Great Schools, 2017). Eighty-seven percent of the teachers have three or more years of experience.

Data collection involved gathering individual interviews and observations. While 16 certified middle school teachers were eligible to take part in this study, in considering the nature of some of the teachers' assignments, such as Art, Physical Education, and Electives, the researcher decided to focus on teachers in core classes. A final tally of 12 teachers from various core content areas, including Math, English, Social Studies, and Science, agreed to participate in the study (see Table 1). Eight of the participants held a bachelor's degree, while the other four had a master's degree. Among the teachers, three teach 6th grade, four teach 7th grade, four teach 8th grade, and one has a split between 7th and 8th grade.

Table 1

Demographic Background of Participants

Participant	Grade and Subject Taught	Years of Experience	Educational Background
P1	6th Science	12	Bachelor's Degree
P2	6th Social Studies	10	Master's Degree
P3	6th Math	10	Bachelor's Degree
P4	6th English	3	Bachelor's Degree
P5	7th English	19	Bachelor's Degree
P6	7th Math	15	Master's Degree
P7	7th Math	8	Master's Degree
P8	7th and 8th ELA and SS	5	Bachelor's Degree
P9	8th English	5	Bachelor's Degree
P10	8th History	4	Bachelor's Degree
P11	8th History	3	Bachelor's Degree
P12	8th Science	11	Master's Degree

Note. ELA and SS stand for English and Language Arts and Social Studies, respectively.

Of the 12 participants, four were Caucasian and eight were Hispanic. There were eight females and four male participants (see Table 2). The findings of this qualitative case study were based on these participants' responses given in the individual interviews, along with their observational notes (see Appendices D and E). Although all of the participants held a teacher's certification in the subject taught, two also held a dual certification in their content area and Special Education. Another participant also held a principal certification but decided to return to the classroom. Participant 11 is a Science teacher who also coaches seventh-grade sports.

Table 2

Participants: Gender and Race

Certified Teachers	<i>N</i> = 12
Gender	
Male	4
Female	8
Race	
Hispanic	8
Caucasian	4

Research Methodology and Analysis

Exploration of this case study allowed me to identify patterns, and construct conclusions, based on the conceptual framework used to interpret the data. That conceptual framework is outlined in Chapter 1, and further supported by the theoretical foundations based on the literature review in Chapter 2 as well as the methodology for data collection and analysis described in Chapter 3. This study included data collected from transcribed individual interviews conducted using the format in Appendix D. All interviews were coded manually. I then used a round of descriptive coding to assist in defining emergent themes. As Saldaña (2009) notes, descriptive coding summarizes in a word or short phrase the basic topic of a passage or segment of qualitative data. As Saldaña (2009) also asserted,

Descriptive coding is appropriate for virtually all qualitative studies, but particularly for beginning qualitative researchers learning how to code data, ethnographies, and studies with a wide variety of data forms such as interview transcripts, field notes, journals, documents, diaries, correspondence, artifacts, and video. (p.106)

A case study design has five components: a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to the propositions; and the criteria for interpreting the findings (Yin, 2014). According to Yin (2014), the proposition for the study guides both the data collection as well as the data analysis. The data-collection process was initiated after approval was obtained from the CU-Portland IRB and the administrator of the middle school (see Appendix A). Twelve teachers were identified as potential participants for this study and were notified through email of the request to take part in the study. They were also given an in-depth description of each phase of the case study. The researcher used the case study to explore the perceptions of middle school teachers regarding how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' learning or behavior in the classroom.

To increase the reliability of the study, detailed notes and transcribed interviews were used to record important information that might prove meaningful in the analysis process. All participants were given guided questions to facilitate the study, and each interview focused on student behavior as it relates to teacher attire. Along with the semistructured interviews that were conducted with each teacher with the aid of the interview guide, an observational protocol was also utilized for teachers to make observations and notations based on their interactions with students on the days they dressed in "professional attire," as defined previously. Teachers were asked to respond to four questions based on their overall experience on the days they chose to dress in attire defined as professional versus the days they chose to dress casually (see Appendix E). The interviews were held in the library media room of the middle school campus and allowed for participant-led discussions in response to some of the interview questions.

During the interviews, the researcher made field notes on the replies of each participant. A spreadsheet program was used to record the transcribed interviews, and brackets were used for

nonverbal data. Participants were asked to review the transcribed interview data to increase the accuracy of the transcripts and address possible errors. Multiple readings of the participants' interviews were conducted to gain the perspectives of the participants, and to identify and group common themes, codes, and categories (Saldaña, 2009). Member checking is also known as participant verification (Rager, 2005).

The first round of coding focused on looking at key words and phrases in the individual transcripts and identifying predominant perspectives among the participants. Each interview transcript was read carefully and key concepts, words, or phrases in the data were recorded and notated in a separate document, to facilitate a thorough thematic analysis. The interview coding represented the frequency with which educators used significant terms or expressions. After the data were interpreted through the initial coding process, the results were examined for emerging themes. The objective was to apply, develop, and endorse the results that emerged from the analysis of the data. Central concepts that initially emerged involved the words or phrases shown in Table 3.

Table 3

Participant Key Phrases Used to Describe the Impact of Teacher Attire

Participant	Perceptions of How Attire Affects Students
P1	Influences students, has an impact on teachers, projects a positive attitude and knowledge.
P2	Has a positive impact on students, only professionals that a student engages with, all teachers' dress professionally, students would view them as an authority, somebody worthy of respect.
P3	Middle school level teachers should be professionally attired; teachers present ourselves how we want to be viewed.
P4	Teachers are role models; students look up to teachers and want to be a teacher as well.
P5	Attire has a positive impact on students' behavior; students will either feel unengaged if a disruption in class broke out; students would need to feel confident teacher can handle it, I would be able or willing to handle it.
P6	Teachers' attire says they are interested in their students' learning, and they take their job seriously.
P7	Students see a role model, someone who cares enough to take time to make a visual impression on students as well as an educational impact. It says that, even on a bad day, a concerted effort was made to give, look, and do one's best, make sure the focus is on my students' focus, is where it needs to be.
P8	Teachers need to be held in high regard whether they are young or old, attire makes a huge difference, especially for young teachers.
P9	School may be one of the only places they see what professionals look and act like, students need to be able to see that we are set apart from other types of blue-collar jobs. When students come to school, they need to see the teachers as role models, people whom they can look up to and who inspire them to one day become teachers as well.
P10	Professional attire semi-formal with a casual twist to it, respect can be lost in many ways, and sometimes it is hard to get back.
P11	Attire speaks before a teacher says a word, sends out nonverbal signals. Educators should try to minimize signals so that students can concentrate on the lesson or assignment that is given; it represents safety and security for students as well
P12	Teacher's attire has changed; children should have role models in how to dress and how to be in the business world.

According to Oliver-Hoyo and Allen (2006), the significance of qualitative research comes from the role it plays in investigating the reasons and processes leading to certain results.

Issues of validity or trustworthiness in this research were addressed by providing rich, thick descriptions of the data and results, so that the findings could be applied in other instances. Triangulation was employed to show the research study's findings are credible. Dependability was established by member checking.

In the second round of coding, the key concepts in transcripts were sorted into subcategories of data, which were then coded as such. A list of possible subcategories is listed in Appendix F, with overarching concepts marked by the first word or phrase in each column. Next, I looked for commonalities within each category, a process that allowed themes to emerge. For instance, six participants frequently mentioned the importance of attire vis-à-vis students' perception of teachers' professionalism, and further related this concept to the reliability, competence, or preparedness of a teacher. Each participant also expressed his or her belief about the importance of professional attire for shaping student behavior. However, two of the twelve participants argued that, when it comes to teaching middle school students, it is the teacher who makes the difference, not the attire of the teacher.

In the last round of coding, the data were reviewed to determine the leading categories and themes; representations of these steps in the analysis can be found in Appendix G. After all the transcripts were categorized and a thorough comparison of the data within each of the twelve transcripts was completed, a final reading of each transcript was conducted. I reformulated the categories to generate new categories from the data gathered from each interview. Then, I reassessed the data to ensure whether all my coding was accurate and precise. This process went on until no further categories could be formulated. Similar categories were combined, and a clear picture began to develop regarding the effect of attire on professionalism, challenges associated with teachers' attire, school culture and professional attire, self-esteem and teacher attire, and

student perception of a teacher attire. I then repeated the same process of looking for any additional data or potential categories by looking at each interview question and the data that question generated from each participant. Transcripts were compared against categories and themes to determine the identification of quotes to support the data. Patterns were sought in the findings related to research questions guiding the inquiry.

Summary of Findings

The findings of this investigation are aligned with the conceptual framework that is, in turn, based on Bandura's (2008) theory of social learning. This theory emphasizes personal and environmental factors that influence each other bi-directionally. The results confirmed that consistency in professional attire contributes to a sense of respect for teachers, and that sense of respect itself functions as a positive strategy for classroom management.

According to the findings, most participants had similar observations regarding students. In general, they indicated they experienced an overall feeling of greater empowerment on the experimental days, on which they wore "professional" attire. They asserted that this feeling gave them a stronger perception of being an authority in the classroom. While most participants felt a sense of empowerment, five held that they did not perceive their attire having an impact on student learning. For others, however, attire influences students' respect for teachers and is necessary if optimal learning is to take place. One participant stated that in order to have the optimal relationship with students, teachers should consider how their attire may affect them. According to Goodlad (1990), students are imitators of the practices of teachers whom they admire, and students often learn from observation. Teachers thus the fundamental role of deciding what, where, when, and how students learn (Goodlad, 1990). Goodlad's findings are complemented by the findings of the present investigation, which suggests that most participants

perceived that their professional attire was significant in terms of students' cognitive and social development, the positive perception of teachers, and the position of teachers as role models in the school and in society.

Presentation of the Data and Results

This study posed the following questions:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?
2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

When participants' responses to the interview questions, in combination with the observation results, were coded and analyzed, five identifiable key themes emerged (see Table 4). In this section, the data and results are presented as they related to the key themes.

The qualitative, face-to-face interviews were intended to discover teachers' perceptions about the effect of their attire on middle school students' academic behavior. The sessions began with an introduction of the study for the participants as well as a review of the procedures that would be used for the interviews. In the guide used as an aid for the interviews, the following two probes were included:

1. What is your teaching experience?
2. What is your educational background?

The central research questions of this study were also posed to participants, and the next section details the themes that emerged from the participants' responses.

Table 4

Descriptive Codes Derived from Participants' Observations and Interviews

<i>Themes</i>	<i>Effect of attire on professionalism</i>	<i>School culture and professional attire</i>	<i>Self- Esteem</i>	<i>Challenges of professional attire</i>	<i>Student perception of teachers' professional attire</i>
<i>Codes</i>	Reliable	Respected	Committed	Comfort	Authority figure
	Communicative	Collegial	Confident	Safety issues	Knowledgeable
	Competent	Prepared	Personal gratification	Supercilious stereotypes	Classroom management
	Organized	Well-qualified	Positive	Dressed for work instead of to work	Safe
	Prepared		Rational		
	Authoritative				
	Appropriate				
	Set apart				
	Less distracting				
	Role Model				
	Knowledgeable				

Key Themes Emerging from Interviews

RQ1: How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?

Two of the participants left the private sector and chose education as their second career. Both stated that their previous careers had a strict dress code. During the interview, one participant stated that the only “dress down” day that was allowed was when employees were doing recruitment, when they wore a polo shirt with the company logo on it and slacks or jeans with dress shoes. Five of the participants had worked in the education field for the duration but had either changed schools, districts, or grade levels. One teacher was a principal in another state

but chose to go back into the classroom because of all the additional responsibilities of holding a principal position, which were difficult to reconcile with raising young children. The remaining five have been at the same school throughout their careers as teachers.

Theme 1: Effect of Attire on Professionalism

A frequent theme that emerged from the responses of eight of the participants involved the strong belief that teachers' attire has an impact on their professionalism. According to Gill (2005), the more interaction one has with one's clients, the more professional the attire one should wear. The clients of an educator include his or her students, their parents, colleagues and administrators, and members of the larger community. Participants shared the idea that as a teacher, one should dress presentably so that one is viewed as a professional by students as well as staff. According to Participant 1,

We should dress according to the profession and the demands of the profession. We should dress how we want to be viewed by others in the professional world. As a science teacher, I wear my lab coat. However, I wear a shirt and slacks underneath. I represent my profession, the school, and the subject I teach every day.

Participant 2 suggested that,

A teacher should dress presentably so that they are viewed as a professional by students as well as staff. A positive culture indeed starts at the top. It is modeled, and it is trickled down from the top. It is important for school districts or administrators to put together a plan of action as it relates to more professional attire for us.

Participant 3 stated, "My attire helps students to understand that I take my job seriously. I am interested in setting good examples for my students. When they see me as a role model for them, a certain level of respect is given." Participant 4 is one of the teachers who came from

private industry, and believes that students are impressionable; he added:

If we present ourselves to them in a professional manner, which also involves how we interact with them and our knowledge, then we can become positive role models as a whole—so that students are saying at a younger age that they want to be teachers, like they did many years ago.

Participant 9 believed that,

Teachers should appear to be set apart from students so that Individuals can tell the difference between the teachers and the students. I remember a couple of times, some of the teachers, well, the younger teachers came to school dressed down, and several individuals confused her with the students. I believe teachers need to be held in high regard whether they are young or old, and I think attire makes a huge difference, especially for young teachers.

Participant 11 noted that attire could send out nonverbal cues, she added that

I think that what I wear speaks for me before I even open my mouth. It sends out all sorts of nonverbal signals. As an educator, I try to minimize those signals so that students can concentrate on the lesson or assignment that is given.

Participant 12 responded similarly, stating that,

It is hard to be taken seriously if you are dressed like a clown or any other profession that has a bad reputation. It just seems that if a teacher dresses up more, the students seem to respect more. Although many teachers wear jeans with a nice dress shirt and accessorize with nice jewelry, I do not consider jeans as professional attire. There are days we have to dress down because of some of our activities. But too many people try to take advantage of this, and there have been times where we have had two weeks' worth of activities that

allowed us to wear jeans. It seemed like the whole culture of the school shifted. And once things start shifting, sometimes it is hard to get back.

Although all 12 participants spoke about how a teacher's professional look sends a positive message to the students, the other participants suggested that professional attire can only take a teacher so far if he or she does not know the content. Participant 10 stated:

My attire personally does not affect my students learning, but I can. By setting expectations for my students, providing them with a safe environment, and valuing them, I have the biggest impact on my students' academic behavior in the classroom because behavior and learning go hand and hand.

The other four participants responded similarly. Thus, participant 5 remarked that

Considering it now, I think that my attire has a positive impact on my student's behavior because if I came to school in more of a dressy attire, students will either feel unengaged or if a disruption in my class broke out, they would not feel confident that I would be able or willing to handle it. In my view, in middle school, a teacher's attire does not make one more or less of a professional. It also does not have any bearing on what individuals think or how they act.

Theme 2: School Culture and Professional Attire

According to Okoro (2011), the 21st-century educational environment is in itself a miniature community where teachers and students interact, exchange ideas and cultures, and influence each other's behavior and capacity for mutual understanding. The perception of seven of the participants in this study was that teachers' professional attire established a strong school culture. Participants 1 and 2 declared that a teacher's attire could promote or inhibit collegial relationships. Participant 4 stated that,

As teachers, we should establish ourselves as an authority in our classroom. Coming from the private industry, there was a culture of professionalism, and it started at the top. We were required to dress professionally. It was stated in our handbook, and no one was confused about what we could or could not wear. There were no fine lines.

Participant 5 remarked that,

When the teachers look professional, the kids feel like we have it all together. How we look says a lot about how our students will react to us. If your hair or clothes look disheveled, they might not take you seriously because you do not look like you have it all together. Teachers must be consistent in the way we dress and act. It says a lot about how you run your classroom. It says a lot about the discipline, the behavior, and the success you have in the classroom, and how the students respect you.

A follow-up question was asked of Participant 5, to get a better idea of her understanding of what professional attire entails. According to her, “Professional attire is making sure that you are groomed neatly and dressed appropriately according to the teacher handbook or what the principal allows.” Participant 6 also worked in private industry, at a large business office, selling different types of insurance before coming into the teaching field. He stated that the culture of the classroom is important. He also stated that

I think that a teacher’s attire shows dedication and how serious they take their profession.

I think overall, it is classroom management. If you are going to come in meaning business in how you look, you will come in with business in the classroom.

Participant 7 asserted,

My attire can specifically influence a student’s behavior on how they view the image and profession of teachers. I mean bad, good or indifferent. The image of teachers is

suffering, and it is reflected in how students, as well as people in other professions, view us.

Establishing a culture in the classroom involves a holding a stance toward teaching and learning that takes into account cultural differences in learning, including different learning styles, differing interaction and communication styles, values, attitudes, behaviors, and language differences. According to the National School Climate Center, the classroom climate includes major spheres of school life such as safety, relationships, teaching, and learning. These dimensions not only shape how students feel about school but also how they feel about other students and teachers (National School Climate Center, 2013). As Participant 9 put it,

For some of the students, the school may be one of the only places they see how professionals look and act. They need to be able to see that teachers are set apart from other types of blue-collar jobs that typically do not require a degree. When students come to school, they need to see the teacher as role models, someone they can look up to and who inspire them to one day become teachers as well.

All 12 of the participants agreed with the idea that teachers in some fashion shape the culture of the school and their classroom, and that they are role models for their students. Participant 12 stated, “Children should have role models to see how to dress in the business world. Teaching is a business!”

Theme 3: Self-Esteem

Five participants indicated that they received personal gratification in dressing professionally, especially after observing the reactions of their fellow teachers and the students in their class. Participant 1 responded, “I don’t think it influences them as much as it has an impact on me. Dressing professionally makes me feel good about myself, and therefore, I project a

positive attitude and knowledge towards my students.” After Participant 1 completed his first self-observation, he stated,

Since I dress in my lab coat, shirt, tie, and slacks, I decided to do the opposite and dress in jeans and a shirt and tie. I think that it had more of an impact on me because I felt a little less focused. My students may have enjoyed it more because I think I appeared more personable.

Furthermore, Participant 6 recalled how “I had to go to the district office on [a date], so I always try to dress more professional. I did notice that the adults treated me different. In a way, that made me feel more self-assured.” Participant 7 stated that attire does not influence students’ learning behavior; the individual teacher does. However, because he had eight years of experience at the time of interview, he was already adept at establishing a productive class culture. Other teachers, particularly less experienced ones, may benefit from a “more conservative dress style.”

Theme 4: The Challenges of Wearing Professional Attire

Although some districts still maintain that teachers should have the freedom to make their own decisions about what they consider to be professional, other administrators argue that teachers are abusing what they see as lax clothing policies (Ettenheim, 2011). “Business casual” is the expression that most schools use to describe the level of the professional dress required for their teachers. However, some participants asserted that wearing professional attire does present challenges. For example, while previous research has indicated that a teacher’s appearance can influence their professionalism and demeanor in the classroom, six of the study participants mentioned that in today’s society, it can be a challenge to distinguish between casual and professional. Furthermore, according to Participant 5,

Most kids nowadays do not respect “authority figures.” Instead of coming dressed up, to provoke fear in students, we should concentrate on coming to school well-groomed and appropriate so that we are comfortable and students feel comfortable enough to approach us. In essence, they feel more connected to us.

Participant 10 stated that everyday duties could interfere with the desire to dress professionally, and Participant 11 corroborated this sentiment, noting:

Although this is not a rough school, it still has its challenges. And as a teacher, I want to be ready to move my students wherever they need to be to keep them safe. When I think of professional attire, I think about some shoe that looks very nice, but it is not very comfortable. Therefore, I may end up taking them off and putting on some sandals, which are not safe nor comfortable either. A pair of tennis shoes would help to ensure that I can get my students to safety.

The school reports there is 10% discipline and referral rate at the school due to fights; also, the school has a mandatory fire drill of once a month. A lockdown drill is also required by the school, which may not require much movement if a teacher is in their classroom. However, if a teacher is in the hall during a lockdown, teachers are required to move students expeditiously to a secure location, if they are not close to their assigned classroom.

RQ2: How do Public Middle School Teachers Describe Attire as a Component of Their Professionalism and Classroom Persona?

Theme 5: Students' perceptions of teachers' professional attire. According to Rubio (2009), students' perception, attitudes, and/or experiences with an effective teacher can vary depending on the individual: "An effective teacher has been considered, sometimes, as a perfectionist, encouraging, approachable and caring, other times as intelligent, but above all, as enthusiastic, funny, clever, effective and understanding, open, and with a relaxed style while teaching" (p. 1). Seven participants iterated the importance of being a role model for students and gaining their trust and respect. Three other participants spoke not only about the importance of a teacher's attire when it comes to gaining respect, but also about leaving an impression on students.

Participant 9 noted:

I dress in a way that lets my students know that my job as their teacher is an important one. If my attire makes a positive impression on them, then I know that they will hold me in high regard. Of course, I also have to establish myself as a person that is concerned about not only their future but also what is currently going on in their world. My attire should not lead others to believe that I cannot relate to them. Otherwise, students may not be receptive, and it could hinder their learning.

Participant 4 worked in the business industry, where he was required to dress professionally daily, and insisted that middle school students are just younger adults. He asserted that

If teachers present themselves to students in a professional manner, which also, of course, involves, interaction with them as well as knowledge, then teachers can become positive

role models as a whole—with students saying at a younger age that they want to be teachers, like they used to do many years ago.

Carr, Davies, and Lavin (2009) stated that what teachers do, how they act, and possibly how they look may be as significant as the lessons discussed in the classroom. Therefore, based on a teacher's professional attire, students might perceive him or her as more knowledgeable and authoritative, with the attire thus having a significant impact on student behavior in the classroom.

The term *authority* was used by seven of the participants. Participant 6 stated, "I think it says, that I am interested in my students' learning. I take this job seriously. And that I am an authority figure." Participant 2 shared, "If all teachers would dress professionally, students may view them as an authority and somebody worthy of respect." Participant 6 stated that all teachers should have authority over their class. Participant 9 expressed this view of professional attire:

I think that teachers who wear dress slacks, a nice shirt or sweater, and comfortable shoes are those considered dressed professionally. Of course, women can also wear a dress and a skirt. There are also varying degrees of professional attire. But overall, I think that a well-dressed person in any field can make the layperson feel a little intimidated. As a teacher, I need my students to know who the authority is in the classroom, and through building relationships with them, they may find me less intimidating but still in charge.

The term *authority* or cognates of the word were used in eight of the observations by the participants. Ten participants alleged that dressing in what they believed was professional attire did not make them feel any more or less as an authority figure. However, Participant 3 asserted that on the day she wore her professional attire, she noticed that she spoke with a greater sense of authority. Participants 5, 6, and 10 had similar reactions. Participant 5 stated, "I established my

authority in the classroom many years ago. I wore a dress with closed toes shoes, and I held the same amount of authority as always.” Participant 6 remarked that,

I have been teaching way too long to notice student’s reaction to my attire. This is because I have dressed in what I have considered more professional clothes and then more casual clothes. But what I noticed that matters is the teacher’s style of teaching that has the biggest impact on student behavior and learning. But I did dress up for my observations. And again, because I am a passionate teacher, the students were engaged. Some took note of what I had on, in passing. But I didn’t skip a beat.

Distractions in the classroom take away from the time students have to spend on skills to be learned. If this is a type of distraction that is continuous, it could seriously affect the classroom. Therefore, distraction in the classroom could also affect both the school and its classroom culture. Morris, Gorham, Cohen, and Huffman (1998) stated that student perceptions of how a teacher is dressed could waste as much as 15 minutes of class time. Along these lines, participants 2, 3, and 11 implied that attire could affect classroom management. Participant 3 suggested that a teacher’s attire can be a distraction, which means that students are not focusing on the lesson: “even if a teacher wears overly bright colors, they can unknowingly cause distractions.” Participant 11 stated,

Somewhere some teachers decided that being flashy or dressing like one would do for a hot date or like you just rolled out of bed was more important than students’ time on task. Some students will not be able to attend to the assignment given because of a teacher’s attire. And if you add any students that may have Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD), it is already hard for them to focus. Therefore, a teacher’s attire can impede learning.

It is important to note, however, that four participants believed that teacher attire could be a distraction to students, yet have no impact on student learning. Participant 2 stated that she did not think attire influences student learning, but that depending on what the teacher has on, it could lead to some time off task. According to Participant 5, “Teachers influence learning, not what they have on. However, a student’s attire can lead to disruptions, and that is why they have a more stringent dress code.” Further, Participant 6 stated that,

I don’t think that my attire personally influences a student’s behavior. However, I have seen teachers who have dressed like they were going on a date. Parents and other teachers started talking. Soon, people were looking her up on Instagram and Facebook. There were some not too appropriate pictures out there, and she was released from her contract. The students knew about it, and it was the conversation in the hallway for a couple of days.

Participant 10 agreed with this position, suggesting that

My attire, personally, does not affect my students’ learning, but I can. By setting expectations for my students, providing them with a safe environment, and valuing who they are. This has the biggest impact on my students’ academic behavior in the classroom because behavior and learning go hand and hand.

Analysis of the Data from Teacher Observations

Although students did not have any direct interaction with the researcher, due to the fact the researcher held a previous position as a teacher at the school, once she was recognized by the students their focus was diverted away from the teacher. This diversion occurred at all levels except for the sixth grade, where the students were coming in new to the school. After the first direct observation, the principal and five of the participants discussed an alternate arrangement

for observation, in which they would recount their experience and interactions with their students on the assigned experimental day. The other participants who were not present were made aware of the changes and consented to continue participation. Participants made anecdotal notes about the students' behavior in Word files, then saved the files onto flash drives that were provided by the researcher.

After the completion of each assigned experimental day, participants logged in their observational notes about student interactions vis-à-vis their attire. Upon collecting all the flash drives, I reviewed and read over each participant's observation checklist (see Appendix E). I then typed a narrative summary of each participant's observation checklist data in order to get a brief snapshot of what they observed in their classroom. I organized this information into emergent themes that were identified during the analysis process.

Once preliminary themes were determined, with each iteration of chunking and coding, they were then sent to participants via email for member checking, to empower them with respect to the analysis of the data. Their feedback facilitated revision and hence a synthesis of the data into more meaningful, trustworthy themes. According to Simon (2011), validity is what ensures accuracy in qualitative research data. As discussed in Chapter 3, there are a variety of approaches a researcher can implement to address validity. Member checking, triangulation, and expert review are three different avenues to attaining validity (Simon, 2011). All 12 participants were given opportunities to engage in member checking, with all participants reviewing their transcripts and also checking the audio recording at the conclusion of the interview.

According to Creswell (2013), member checking is imperative throughout the data-collection process, to regulate the accuracy of perceptions of participants in qualitative research. For this study, research questions were crosschecked with the recorded data, and throughout the

interview process, each participant confirmed the accuracy of the transcript for credibility. Using the data collected on the flash drives, participants also crosschecked data that were collected individually with those gathered by the researcher.

As already suggested by the previous section, these themes became the framework for presenting the findings of my study, in ways that address both of my central research questions. Based on the observations that participants shared with the researcher, three questions were asked to assist in developing themes from the observation data (see Appendix D). The themes that emerged from the observational experiences were similar to those that emerged from the semistructured interviews: namely, (a) attitude, (b) authority, and (c) student perception. These themes are largely congruent with the themes from the semistructured interviews.

All of the participant interviews were compared with the transcripts in order to substantiate the concepts and statements of each teacher. Also, the researcher referred to the observations in the context of the face-to-face interview. This allowed teachers the opportunity to elaborate on their experiences.

RQ1: How do Public Middle School Teachers Understand how Their Attire may Impact or Affect Middle School Students' Academic Behavior in the Classroom?

Theme 1: Attitude. The data collected through the observations revealed that three of the participants who had the most teaching expertise, including participant 7, an ex-administrator, believed their experience had established them as a role model or an authority figure, rather than their attire. However, during their observations, they did concede that dressing in a professional manner does project an attitude of esteem. Thus, Participant 7 wrote:

I dress in a suit every day. As a principal, I did the same thing. It may be a carry-over from when I was an administrator, but I did wear a pair of starched black jeans and a

button-down shirt (starched) with dress shoes for my observation. The students acknowledged the fact that I was not dressed up, but I “looked nice.” We were able to dialogue about attire and appropriate attire for different professions. It was very interesting. I think this shows that dressing like you care about yourself goes a long way. But dressing up still won’t hide inexperience.

Participant 4 stated that although she did not feel any particular way when she dressed professionally, she did notice that she spoke with more authority. She also stated, “The second time I wore professional attire was great also. Making sure that I had everything ready the night before made a big difference. When I dress in what I consider professional attire, I feel more assertive.”

When asked if the students noticed any difference in her observation days, Participant 5 remarked:

My first observation shows that individuals notice a change in appearance. My students told me I looked nice throughout the day. And even some of the faculty and staff also noticed me as well. Although I felt good, I think that because this is not my everyday attire, the compliments became annoying to me.

A follow-up question was posed to Participant 5 about her observation during the interview session—namely, “what made the compliments of other professionals annoying to you?” She responded,

I think if it were simply a compliment, that would have been okay, but some of the teachers would ask why I was dressed up, which required more of a dialogue. I went from feeling confident to feeling suspicious of those who were asking questions. So, I decided to continue the “dressed-up” look for the rest of the week.

Prior research has determined that clothing has a physical and psychological effect on those who wear them. Therefore, in line with Harbin's findings (2018), when one has an outfit that one prefers over other options, this could be caused not only by receiving positive comments about that outfit but also by achieving some success when wearing it.

Theme 2: Authority. One participant held that their attire did not have any impact on students' behavior. However, they felt that formal dress enabled them to speak with more authority. Participant 7 said something similar in his observation statement:

My first observation shows that individuals notice a change in appearance. My students told me I looked nice throughout the day. However, some of the faculty and staff also took notice as well. My second day in professional attire was much like the first. I believe that new teachers should consider dressing up their first three or four years in the profession because I think it can help with student perception. I maintain rule and order in my classroom, so classroom management is not a weakness. But I do think it changed some of the perceptions amongst my colleagues and other administrators.

Participant 10 maintained that she did not feel any different when she dressed in what she defined as professional clothing:

I noticed that I spoke with more authority. The second time I wore professional attire was great also. Making sure that I had everything ready the night before made a big difference. When I dress professionally, I typically am a "no nonsense" type of teacher. But I felt more assertive and empowered when I dressed up. I can see how my attire or the attire of teachers can bring a higher degree of respect to the profession. I know it sounds silly, but I thought my students would be intimidated by me and shut down. But I

taught the lesson and asked questions, and it was as if they answered at higher levels of understanding.

When asked what the difference was, she stated that perhaps it was the level of confidence in the subject she projected. Other participants also claimed that when dressed more formally they experienced a heightened sense of authority.

RQ2: How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

Theme 3: Student behavior. Although no students were interviewed for this investigation, participants made direct observations and noted any actions, reactions, or comments students made in the classroom based on their attire. Participant 1 decided to deviate from his normal attire, which was comprised of lab coat, shirt, tie, and slacks. On his observation day, he wore jeans, shirt, and a tie. He stated,

I think that it had more of an impact on me because I felt a little less focused. My students may have enjoyed it more. I think to them I appeared more personable.

I found that the second day when I decided not to wear a tie, some students seemed to lose focus on their responses to questions related to the course content. They would add random discussions to see what my thoughts were on some issues. Not that it was “too far [out] left [in left field],” but it was not on the focus of our study. I felt this was due to my relaxed demeanor and attitude. Although they were not as focused, there were not behavior problems because after teaching for so many years, a teacher should pretty much know how to manage their class.

Participant 2 stated that, after her second day wearing professional attire, she noticed that the students appeared to be more focused. She further stated, “I think that if they weren’t more

focused, then maybe I was more focused on them.” I asked a follow-up question about what made her believe that the clothes made her more focused; her response was:

I think that the more professional my attire is, the more I command attention, not so much as my student’s merely noticing what I have on. But if that captures their attention, then I can show them not only do I look like I know what I am talking about; I do know what I am talking about, which means that I have to be more focused.

Camacho’s (2005) research confirmed that formal attire is not the most salient factor bearing on students’ behavior. However, the experience of the participants in the present study suggests that the positive influence of professional attire on the individual teacher does indeed influence the behavior of the students.

Summary

The purpose of this case study was to understand the teacher’s perceptions about how their attire affected middle school students’ academic behavior in the classroom. This chapter presented and discussed the data gathered over the course of the study in order to address its two central research questions. A qualitative case study design was employed for this investigation, and 12 certified teachers presented their perceptions of the effect of teachers’ attire on students’ behavior and learning. The data-collection process yielded findings that aligned with the literature and with current research related to the study’s questions.

As a result of the analysis of teacher interviews, five key themes emerged, and one additional theme was developed through the observational protocol. Both the interviews and the observations suggested that participants who had the most teaching experience found professional attire to be of some significance, but less important than knowledge of content and being prepared in the classroom. Teachers with less experience asserted that professional attire

has some influence, but also that other factors should be considered when trying to determine the effect of attire on student behavior. The participants noted that schools and districts use the term *appropriate* for teacher attire, but that that term can be interpreted loosely. Therefore, teachers can be somewhat confused about what exactly constitutes professional, appropriate attire. Although most of the participants agreed that professional attire influences students, some also stated that they had the feeling of being over-dressed and uncomfortable in professional attire.

While research within the past five years has brought new interest in the topic of how teachers' attire impacts student academic behavior, the results of the present study suggest that there is variability in the degree of impact. The participants in the study provided their perspectives based on their professional experiences, and it is evident that there were discrepancies among the participants' ideas about what constitutes "appropriate" attire. Chapter 5 provides a further critical analysis of the five themes. It also develops further interpretations of the findings and outlines directions for future work in this area of inquiry.

Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss and interpret the results of this case study on teachers' perceptions of how their attire affects middle school students' academic performance. Based on an exhaustive search for similar studies, an instrument was developed that would best answer the research questions. Through the use of a qualitative, descriptive case study at a suburban school in Texas, teachers' perceptions, experiences, and attitudes about the effects of their attire on student behavior were explored. Data were collected using purposeful sampling that involved semistructured interviews and observations.

This chapter summarizes the results of the data collected from interviews and observations, and discusses the results of the analysis of those data as they relate to the literature as well as the study's central research questions. The chapter also reviews limitations that impacted study results, while exploring its implications for future practice for schools and teachers. The chapter concludes by outlining directions for future research.

The qualitative case study was designed to explore how teachers perceive professional attire as influencing a student's learning, thereby addressing two main research questions:

1. How do public middle school teachers understand how their attire may impact or affect middle school students' academic behavior in the classroom?
2. How do public middle school teachers describe attire as a component of their professionalism and classroom persona?

. While 16 certified teachers were identified as possible participants in the study, four taught in classes that required a more casual attire or a uniform based on classroom activities, such as physical education, band, and art. A group of 12 certified middle school teachers who taught core subjects were thus selected as the research participants. A-semi structured individual

interview method, along with an observational protocol, were employed in the study. Participants were asked to contribute to the research by making two observations of the effect their attire had on students, using an observational tool developed by the researcher.

The semistructured interviews provided respondents with the opportunity to elaborate on their perceptions of professional attire as it relates to students' academic performance. The study was thus aligned with the Bandura's (1977) principles of social learning, which center on the continuous interaction between human practical behaviors, their cognitive behaviors, and their environmental influences. Chapter 4 presented data from the participant interviews and observations, from which five key themes emerged. Theme 1 concerned the participants' understanding and perception of professional attire for teachers, and the effect it has on professionalism. Theme 2 involved the issues and challenges with the professional attire of teachers. Theme 3 addressed the participants' view of how attire can establish school and classroom culture. Theme 4 provided insight into the participants' perceptions of how attire affects self-esteem. Theme 5 concerned student perceptions of teacher attire.

Summary of Results

The emergent themes in this dissertation provided insight into the perceptions of the participants. With respect to the first main research question, the results of the research showed that all of the teachers interviewed believed that a teacher's lack of professional attire could affect students' academic performance.

The literature review supported the findings of this study. According to Wong and Wong (2005), a teacher should dress for four main effects: respect, credibility, acceptance, and authority. Mohammed (2013) noted that personal and social values are communicated through teachers' attire and appearance, and Saiki (2006) found that teachers who were professionally

attired were perceived by students as being believable, knowledgeable, and qualified. Although this perception of knowledge may only last for a few weeks, teachers who make a concerted effort to improve students' attitudes through their attire could cause a more positive learning environment in the classroom (Joseph, 2017). All 12 participants admitted to feeling more empowered in their classes, on the days of their observations. Participants also insisted that professional attire must be accompanied by skilled teaching. Thus, one participant who worked in the private sector before becoming a teacher insisted that teachers must present themselves to students in a professional manner, which involves both professional dress and knowledge of the content.

With respect to my second main research question, several participants, while admitting that teachers' attire could impact students' academic performance, maintained that their experience as a teacher is the deciding factor in students' behavior and academic achievement. This finding may assist school district administrators in understanding the social and cultural environment of their campuses as they consider implementing dress codes for teachers. In that same connection, studies have indicated that the potency of clothing communication relies on a "code," which represents knowledge about social and cultural norms that members of communities or social groups share (Danesi, 2004). Hence, as McCracken and Roth (1989) note, "Minor modifications to clothing style can have a major impact on the information conveyed to the perceivers" (p. 16). According to Howlett (2013), appearance, posture, and dress have all been found to communicate a range of personality traits, as well as occupational and social roles. Therefore, whatever the dress code assigned to teachers at a school, they should always dress in a fashion that well convey positive personal attributes.

Discussion of the Results

The analysis of the data yielded five key themes, which buttressed the conceptual framework used to address the research questions. The findings of this study suggested that teachers are cognizant of the role attire can play in the classroom and in school culture. At the same time, however, teachers with more experience stated that teachers could maintain a professional presence, even if they were not dressed in formal clothing, such as a suit and tie for men or a skirt and blouse for women. Participant 7 asserted,

My attire does not influence students learning behavior—I do. However, I have built and established the respect of my students over the past eight years. My attire is not as important to them as it is to me. Unfortunately, this is not true for everyone else.

Other participants remarked that the younger a teacher is, the more important attire becomes, especially as it relates to the teacher's impact on students. As Participant 3 put it,

I think for younger teachers their attire influences the behavior of students. At least for the most part. This is because sometimes administrators acquiesce to younger teachers' idea of what professional attire or appropriate is, or assume that the younger teachers will read the employee handbook under what is appropriate. Sometimes they rely too heavily on new teachers' idea of professional or the assumption that they will read the employee handbook.

Hence, one way for new teachers to appear less like novices may be to dress more conservatively.

Effect of Attire on Professionalism

Carr et al. (2010) affirmed that a teacher's credibility benefits both the teacher as well as the student. Given the significant influence that teachers can have on their students, they should

also be aware of factors that can have an impact on their professionalism, as seen through the lens of students. Underlying all the responses from the participants was an assumption that a teacher's attire can create the impression of his or her being highly qualified or effective as a teacher. Even the participants who maintained that the outward look of a teacher did not matter as much as knowledge of the subject matter admitted that dressing professionally had a positive impact on their self-confidence. Participant 3 asserted, "I think that it does feel great to wear clothes as if you are going to a business." Participant 8 noticed during her observation that "Everyone seemed to acknowledge me, teachers, students, and even my family, when I went home." According to Larson (2014), "Clothes are one of the non-verbal signals which inevitably transmit social signals and clothes are closely related to self-representation. Therefore, they can be used to make a desired impression" (p. 3). Mosca and Buzza (2013) suggested that dressing for success establishes respect, credibility, and the appearance of being an authority figure. Without these three characteristics, it is difficult for teachers to maintain their professional status.

Malloy (1996) suggested that teachers are not viewed or even paid as professionals because they do not dress as professionals. Teachers' salaries more closely resemble the salaries of social workers, ministers, and clerical staff than those of other professionals. That said, Black (2016) argued that within the overall system of depressed wages, school districts have wildly unequal financial capacities to attract candidates. Therefore, despite Mallory's (1996) assertion about attire, teachers' dress may not go very far in explaining why teachers do not receive pay comparable to that received by the members of other professions.

Nevertheless, it is essential that teachers recognize that their credibility can be inextricably tied to how well their students perform. According to Workman and Freeburg (2010), students learn attitudes and behaviors by observing teachers; therefore, teachers should

be concerned about all aspects of displaying effective conduct and also model appropriate attire in the classroom. Participant 6 asserted:

I have been teaching way too long to notice the reaction of my attire on students. This is because I have dressed in what I have considered more professional than casual. But what I noticed matters, is the teacher's style of teaching.

Participant 6, as well as the other two participants who believe their experience as a teacher is the deciding factor in students' academic achievement, also agree that on some level a teacher's attire has the capability of affecting student behavior. This study's finding that teachers perceive their attire as being capable of affect students' behavior and performance also aligns with the literature. Previous research indicates that clothing that is either extremely casual or age-inappropriate might allow teachers to connect with the students on a personal level, but at the cost of their sense of authority and control over the classroom (Hadfield, 2011).

The Challenges of Wearing Professional Attire

Some teachers may elect to wear a specific kind of attire to work because it is comfortable; at other times, their choice of attire may be based on convenience. One participant suggested that if the school or the district wanted teachers to dress more professionally, then there would need to be a substantial pay raise. In any case, what a teacher wears can impact their colleagues and students. Although some studies highlight the positive impact of professional teacher dress, other studies show that the most positive influences of teacher dress were found in highly casual conditions where teachers wore jeans, T-shirts, and flannel shirts. In harmony with previous research addressing common barriers to wearing professional attire, some of the issues mentioned by the participants in the present study included comfort, safety issues, and the difficulty of distinguishing between casual and professional.

Although common standards for effective teaching are made available by most school districts, the standard of appearance varies greatly among schools, despite it being an area with which both new and veteran teachers struggle (Bland, 2005). Some elements of “professional attire” may conceivably be a hindrance in the classroom. Miller (2004) reports that proper attire can create a change in perceptions of one’s effectiveness on the job, and can either facilitate or impede human interaction. Although there may be an overall benefit from teachers wearing professional attire, according to Harbin (2018) some teachers may feel encumbered by professional attire. Some of the participants in the present study weighed in on their level of comfort with professional attire. Participant 3 stated:

A pair of tennis shoes would help to ensure that I am able to get my students to safety.

Considering it now, I think that my attire has a positive impact on my student’s behavior because if I came to school in more of a dressy attire, students will either feel unengaged or if a disruption in my class broke out, they would not feel confident that I would be able or willing to handle it.

Participant 11 stated similar concerns. When asked how professional attire could negatively influence or impact students, Participant 11 remarked:

A teacher’s attire represents safety and security for students as well. Teachers who wear clothing that is too tight or heels that are too high could put themselves or other students or staff in danger. In the case where there is an emergency such as a fire alarm or a lockdown, teachers need to be able to move with swiftness.

Given that teachers serve as role models for students, it is important for them to dress appropriately; but to do so, teachers must know what the standards of appropriateness are.

According to Workman and Freeburg (2010), it can be extremely difficult to establish authority

and discipline in the classroom if the teacher looks just like one of the students. Yet casual clothes tend to be more comfortable, and in a study by Gordon (2010), teachers stated they dress the way they do to be comfortable. Graham (2016) stated that many teachers assume other roles in schools such as lunch duty, afterschool duty, and other roles that require mobility and comfort. Hence, as Workman and Freeburg (2010) note, the difference between professional and inappropriate attire depends on the context. A tailored suit and well-shined leather shoes look professional, where khakis and coveralls would probably get a teacher sent home. But if the teacher spends a good amount of time assuming extra duties at school, khakis and overalls would be appropriate. Thus, “A standard definition of professional dress for teachers has been needed for a long time because everyone’s been coming up with their own” (Workman & Freeburg, 2010, para 5). Teachers straight out of college appear to be the ones who have the most difficulty in determining which clothes are acceptable in the classroom and which are not.

School Culture and Professional Attire

Students, their parents, administrators, and members of the larger community all put their trust in educators, counting on them to be mature, professional, capable, and competent. Research confirms the teaching atmosphere is improved by dressing professionally (Good, 2014), and formal dress strongly affects how people are treated while improving motivation and performance (Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). Simmons (1996) argues that teachers serve as role models in everything they do, including how they dress. Along similar lines, Participant 2 asserted:

Professional attire as a teacher means that you are dressing presentably so that there is no focus on attire but on the subject that is being taught. I believe it is important that teachers are viewed as professionals with students as well as staff.

Roach (1997) states, “Clothing has an obvious effect on the perceived status of an individual” (p. 125). Participant 5 noted that, with a change to more formal attire, students as well as faculty colleagues and the school staff all noticed the difference. Dress can relay personal information such as mood, intelligence, and authority, and can elicit respect from others. Participant 11 agreed that a teacher’s attire could influence student behavior, but he also believed that he was accorded respect because of his position as a coach. “Students usually respect coaches and know that they can impact their playing time, if they act up in class or are not doing their work” (Participant 11). In any case, items of dress, like other behaviors, are linked to social positions as well as to larger social meanings, so attire is regularly used to infer information about others.

McCracken and Roth (1989) examined how clothing conveys cultural meaning. They suggest the potency of clothing communication relies on a “code,” which represents knowledge about social and cultural norms that members of communities or social groups share. Teacher professional dress codes have a long history in our country. A 1923 teaching contract from Ohio says that female teachers were required to wear “at least two petticoats” and were not allowed to “dress in bright colors or dye their hair.” Today, teachers are wearing slacks, polo-type shirts, and tennis shoes as professional attire. Seldom do male teachers wear a tie in school these days. In other schools, teachers are allowed to have visible tattoos and can dye their hair any color (Freeburg, Workman, Arnett, & Robinson, 2011; Graham, 2016). Participants in the present study spoke about the ability of teachers’ attire to impact the school culture, noting that what teachers wear could make them appear more collegial and qualified. Therefore, although broader societal norms have changed, teachers should consider the overall benefits of wearing professional attire.

Self-Esteem

Workman and Freeman (2010) defined teachers' attitudes about dressing professionally as involving either role embracement or role distance. Teachers who embraced their role as a teacher tended to be neat, clean, and well-groomed, while those who distanced themselves from the role of teacher dressed more casually or even immodestly. In the self-reflections included in their observations, participants noted the significance of self-esteem: most stated that wearing professional attire had an impact on their self-confidence.

Students' Perceptions of Teacher Attire

Participants with the most experience suggested that their students perceived them as being role models, i.e., as reliable authority figures, not because of the way they dressed or did not dress, but because of the relationships that have been built through the years (Figure 1). A teacher's age may thus affect student behavior toward that teacher. Older teachers have more separation from students, which can give them more respect from students. Teachers with years of experience may be perceived as more credible, while younger teachers have to work harder to be seen as competent (Roach, 1997).

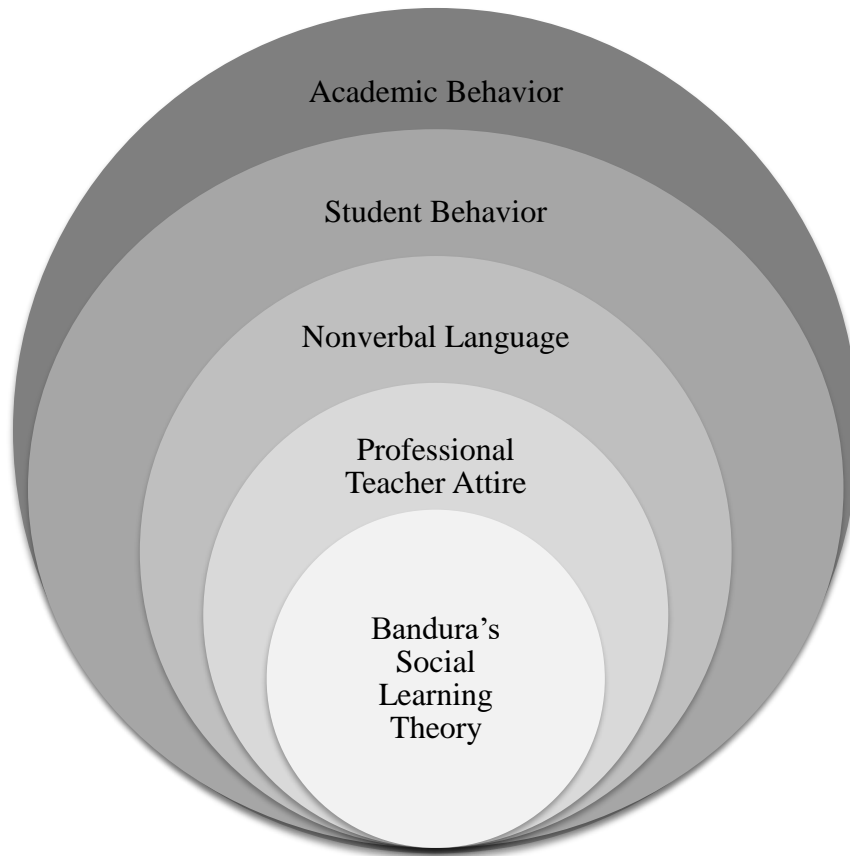


Figure 1. Bandura's social learning theory and teacher attire.

Note. This figure demonstrates the relevance of Bandura's (1977) theory of social learning for the present study. The learner observes the nonverbal communication of the teacher, and this process of observation ultimately leads to changes in students' academic performance (learning outcome).

Discussion of the Results in Relation to the Literature

While there are numerous theories about student behavior, emotions, and cultural norms, the theoretical model for this study was based predominately on the theories of Carr, et al.(2009), Dunbar and Segrin (2011), Harbin (2018), and Sampson (2016); these researchers, too, studied the effects of teachers' attire on student behavior and academic achievement in middle school. In

previous studies, investigators have found that teacher attire can make a difference in the classroom. The degree to which clothing has an impact, however, has yet to be determined. In the present study, it was found not only that students notice teacher attire, but also that other professionals also pay close attention to their fellow teachers' attire as well, oftentimes commenting on it explicitly. According to Bandura's (1989) theory of social learning, and as suggested by Figure 1, learning cannot be wholly explained through reinforcement; the presence of others is also an important influence. As Bandura (1989) puts it, "What people think, believe, and feel affects how they behave. The natural and extrinsic effects of their actions partly determine their thought patterns and affective reasons" (p. 25). Thus, teachers are more inclined to project positive attributes if they are adorned in professional attire, which can, in turn, positively affect the behavior of their students.

Several researchers, in previous studies, elected to show students multiple images of models dressed in casual and professional attire (Carr, Lavin, & Davis, 2009; Gorham, Cohen, & Morris 1999; Roach-Higgins & Eicher, 1992). These images were shown to elicit responses from students regarding the character traits they perceived the pictured teachers to possess. In the present study, by contrast, participants were asked to dress in professional or else casual attire, depending on their experimental day. The data yielded by this protocol were interpreted in light of the idea that we learn in a social context via our interactions with others (Bandura, 2008). Separately, people develop similar behaviors by observing others, as suggested in Figure 2. Equally important is the fact that we create beneficial environments and then proceed to exercise control over them. One of the implications of this study is that through carefully selecting and controlling the environments, individuals can, to some degree, influence classroom outcomes. For instance, if teachers understand that their attire can earn them more respect as well as enable

students to focus better in the classroom, they have taken steps to control their environment. The results of this study also imply that responses to certain teacher behaviors may be linked to student academic achievement. That said, one of the factors that made it difficult to compare the results of this study with prior research was that most previous investigations on this subject allowed for students to take part in the research. However, the researcher found the participants to be credible in their documentation of their experiences as they interacted with students on their assigned experimental day.

Many participants believed that teachers should be self-regulating when it comes to decisions about what to wear; but they also conceded that the items of clothing worn by teachers, though they may not determine what or how students learn, can considerably influence the level of respect that students develop for their teachers. These biases that are formed by teachers' attire influence the students' behavior based on generalized and selective perception (Storm, 1987). Teachers have a powerful, long-lasting influence on their students. This influence can be either positive or negative. They directly and indirectly affect how students learn, what they learn, and how much they learn. Based on these findings, one can assume that teacher-student interaction could be affected by the way teachers dress for class.

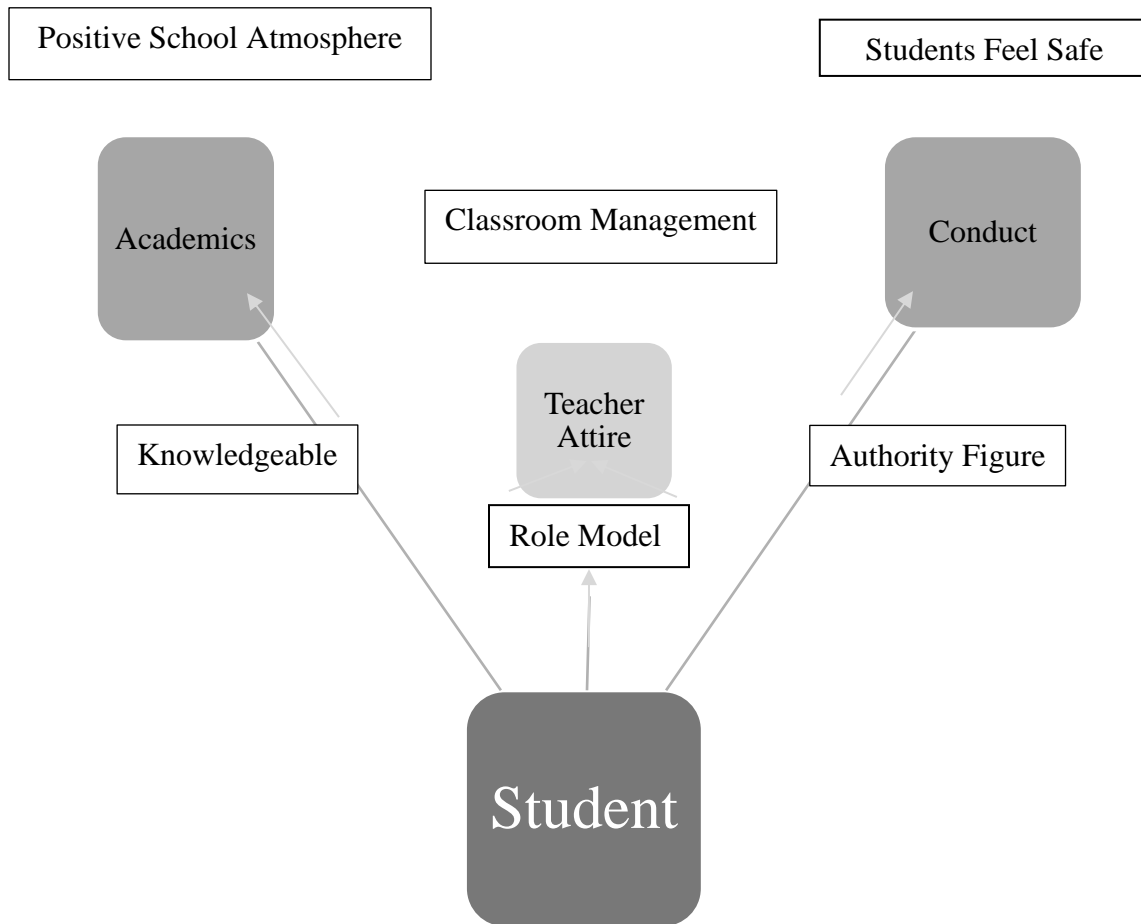


Figure 2. The impact of professional attire.

Figure 2 illustrates how a teacher’s attire can affect a student’s academic performance. Note that the process is based on students’ observation of and interaction with teachers, with these interactions shaping how they think. Based on teachers’ attire, students view teachers as role models because they appear knowledgeable as well as authoritative. Therefore, students are focused more on academic matters and less on conduct and behavior issues. This shift of focus can lead to a positive school atmosphere where students also feel safe.

Limitations

There several limitations of the research design, and thus modifications that could have strengthened the study. The teachers conducted two observations on the impact their professional attire made on their students on two different occasions. One teacher was not able to make any observations because of other responsibilities, meaning that 11 participants at the site conducted 22 observations. Further, the two weeks scheduled for the observations were chosen because of scheduling constraints imposed by other activities, such as common benchmark assessments, fire drills, and academic pull-outs. More observations throughout the school year should be made, and there should be two focus groups, one consisting of teachers and the other of student participants. Some of the questions could have also been more probing, or discussed in greater detail, so as to encourage further dialogue. Finally, although the 11 teachers agreed on altering their dress for their observations, the specific clothing they chose to wear was not determined ahead of time. Some teachers wore slacks and ties as professional attire while other teachers considered khakis and Sperry's (a certain brand of shoes) as professional. Each teacher dressed in accordance with his or her idea of what constituted professional and appropriate attire, in light of the teacher attire section included in the employee handbook.

Implications for Practice, Policy, and Theory

Bandura's (1986) theory of social learning suggests that people learn by observing others. One aspect of his theory is that social reactions affect the recipients' perceptions of themselves and others in a way that either strengthens or alters the environment. Thus, a teacher's attire can bring about a positive or negative reaction from others.

The attire of teachers has been an ongoing debate in many districts and schools. The literature suggests that professionally attired teachers are important assets of middle schools.

However, some teachers find the very idea of implementing a teacher's dress code insulting. The significance of this study is its focus on teacher perceptions in this connection—more specifically, teachers' perceptions that professionally-attired teachers can be pivotal when it comes to making a positive impact on the academic performance of middle school students.

The subject of teacher professionalism and attire has gained the attention of local school systems extending up to superintendent positions in several states. According to the Association of American Educators (2012), although teacher dress codes may vary from district to district or even by the school environment, due to complaints about teachers dressing inappropriately in states across the country, many school districts are pushing for stricter dress codes. When teachers present themselves as professional educators, positive social changes may occur in middle schools and the educational environment in general. Tichenor (2005) asserted that on the most fundamental level, the definition of the professional teacher refers to the status of a person who is paid to teach. However, "on a higher level, [the expression "professional teacher" can be used to] refer to teachers who represent the best in the profession and set the highest standard for best practice" (p. 90). The findings of this study confirm Tichenor's claim.

The implications of this study also provide insights for teachers, administrators, and school board member concerning the difference between professional and appropriate attire. Such insights are relevant when it comes to preparing school leaders to meet the needs of teachers, by providing support that will ensure a higher rate of success among teachers. Clearer information about teacher attire may assist younger teachers coming into the profession with the tools to make decisions that are beneficial to their students as well as their careers.

The important role of the teacher as a transformative agent for students and others in the field of teaching requires the mastery of a variety of skills; professional attire should be

considered one of them. This study thus has several implications for teachers, students, principals, and district administrators. According to the participants' perceptions, attire does have some impact on students' academic performance. So the issue of attire needs to be addressed more fully. Joseph (2017), too, suggested that there may be a need for further investigation into what constitutes professional attire for teachers. Lewis (2018) stated that standards for teacher attire should not be framed as a list of unacceptable or inappropriate criticized clothing, but rather as a list of appropriate and recommended forms of attire. Teachers should be encouraged to choose comfortable clothing that reflects their professionalism as educators but also their individual personality.

In defining what is appropriate, several key factors should be considered. It is vital to understand when considering what is appropriate that southern and rural attire may not always be regulated by the same expectations as those regulating suburban attire, or for that matter the same expectations regulating the attire worn by those who live along the coast. In many states, the weather must be treated as a special circumstance as it relates to a teacher's attire. For example, being compelled to wear stockings in the humidity of some southern states could be considered cruel and unusual punishment, according to Smith (2014). Therefore, additional factors must be considered in studies of how teacher attire constitutes an impression-management tool in teaching and learning environments. It may also be useful to explore students' impressions about how teachers transmit nonverbal signals by what they wear to class.

Colleges and universities can use information from this research to guide novice teachers in the area of professional attire, along with other factors that can impact the classroom learning environment. Preparing tomorrow's teachers for the classroom involves guiding and supporting candidates and addressing their public and professional attire, which will allow them to sustain

their roles, obligations, expectations, and identities. Teachers should understand that student behavior can be a powerful predictor of teacher anxiety and burn out (Quin, 2005). To counteract the trend of losing teachers, it is critical to recognize the complex influences that relate to teacher attrition and make necessary changes and accommodations that foster teacher retention. These issues are a cause for concern, and teachers must accept the fact that disengagement on their part could deprive students of learning opportunities. Therefore, if teachers are empowered to recognize that a lack of discipline in the classroom can be exacerbated by both parties, they may have the ability to increase the sustainability of their careers in the teaching profession.

Recommendations for Further Research

This study yielded important results that can be used as a basis for further research on how teachers perceive their attire vis-à-vis students' academic performance. Because of this study's qualitative case study design, the findings cannot necessarily be generalized. However, other researchers and practitioners in the field of education can develop and transfer the findings of this study with a proper consideration of context. Further, while the researcher used a qualitative research design for this study, quantitative tools coupled with the qualitative design may help support (or disconfirm) the findings. For example, a survey followed by statistical analysis can be used to evaluate the data discovered in the qualitative research design.

Taken on its own, qualitative terms, the case study could also have been improved upon with an increased number of observations by the teachers. This would increase the reliability of the data collected. Consistency in teacher attire from the first day of school would also allow more accurate data to be collected; in this way, when observations are conducted, the shock students may feel when they see their teacher in different types of clothing would be removed. Starting the intervention into professional or casual attire at the beginning of the school year

before switching to the other type can prevent students from becoming accustomed to “normal” attire before the observations are implemented.

While educators, politicians, and others continue to debate the issue of professional attire for teachers, teacher attrition rates are continuing to increase. Does research show that there is a relationship between teachers leaving the profession and student behavior? Student behavior could be one reason for the decline in teacher retention. If teachers can curtail negative behavior from students, by whatever means, they may decide to stay in the profession longer. That consideration alone may make it worthwhile to try dressing in professional attire. However, the difference between appropriate and professional attire must be clarified at the local, district, and state levels.

Consequently, several recommendations for further research in this area of the investigation have emerged. One area to explore further is teachers’ perceptions of “appropriate” and “professional” attire. Additional study of this issue may assist administrators in imposing a suitable, more current dress code for teachers. Few researchers have studied the effects of professionalism and dress on the academic performance of students (Carr et al., 2009). Lavin (2010) and Mosca and Buzza (2013) have researched the college-level effect of business faculty attire on student perceptions of the quality of instruction as well as the quality of the program. Joseph (2017) and Rollman (1980) researched high school students’ perception of teachers’ attire. This investigation provided evidence that teachers dressed in professional attire were perceived as more organized and knowledgeable, while informally dressed teachers were perceived as more friendly and flexible. However, data on the effects of teacher attire on middle school students are even less available. Camacho’s (2005) and Sampson’s (2016) work specifically targeted middle school students enrolled in band. Therefore, another

recommendation for further research in this area is to study the relationship of student academic performance and teacher attire.

In the present study, although using manual coding provided for a deeper cognitive understanding and ownership of the formulas and results, the analysis of qualitative data was arduous. According to Saldaña (2009), the reason why the process is so difficult is that it is not fundamentally a mechanical or technical exercise; it is, rather, a dynamic, intuitive, and creative process of inductive reasoning, thinking, and theorizing. Hence, using Computer Assisted Qualitative Data Analysis (CAQDAS) may reduce the burden of handling vast amounts of qualitative data, as well as providing automated categorizing and coding for more efficient record keeping.

Another area requiring further research has been identified by others in the field of education. For example, some researchers have suggested that the younger the teacher, the stronger the chance they will be confused with their students. Research does not confirm that a more formal attire and demeanor will automatically make for a better teacher, but they can be factors in how students perceive them. A person perceived in a position of power can lead to asymmetrical social distance, which should allow a teacher to work from a position of authority. Power as a measure of social distance should principally be considered in this relative sense; the powerful do not feel more socially distant from all people, but specifically from their low-power counterparts in a work-related setting (Magee & Smith, 2013).

Other researchers suggest that the earlier it is in the school year, or the older the students are, the more professionally teachers should dress. Research suggests that the first impression a teacher makes is crucially important. It is vital to maintain a professional image at the middle school level when trying to preserve the desired learning and behavior outcome.

Research in this whole area is relatively limited, but exploring these suggested areas for future research on a targeted demographic could strengthen the present study's findings. Therefore, the final recommendation is to use a larger, more diverse population of middle school teachers as well as middle school students.

Conclusion

Teachers enter the field of education for various reasons. Many may base their decision on their beliefs about how they will enhance learning for their students as well as the role they will play in the lives of the learners. Although most teachers understand that their role extends beyond the academic sphere per se, some may not be able to associate attire with student learning and discipline. Professional attire is only one of the factors that may assist teachers in achieving their desired goal. However, no matter how small the positive effect of dressing professionally may prove to be, it should still be considered a step in the right direction.

The purpose of this study was to examine the effects that professional attire had on students. It was conducted to better understand the influence of teacher attire at the middle school level. Simmons (1996) asserted that teachers who dress casually may encounter more problems with student behavior and academic achievement as compared to those who dress more professionally. Some may find the notion of a teacher's dress code repellent, but the results suggest that teachers themselves perceive their attire to have a positive effect on middle school students, at least to some degree. In assessing the participants' responses to semistructured interviews with 12 certified middle school teachers, the data revealed five themes that are relevant to the central research questions of this study: (a) effect of attire on professionalism, (b) challenges of professional attire, (c) school culture and professional attire, (d) self-esteem, and (e) student perception of teacher attire. While all of the participants agreed that a teacher's attire

had a positive effect on student behavior, two of the participants believed that teacher attire is not as important as teacher compassion and the knowledge that comes through experience.

In short, this qualitative case study shed light on teachers' understanding of the effect their attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning. Given that teachers represent schools, they must understand that, by observing their instructors, students learn about both attitude and behavior. Students who can see their teachers as not only an authority figure but also a role model may decide to emulate them by pursuing a similar career. Therefore, teachers should be concerned with every facet of the modeling effect, including the attire worn in the learning environment (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). Students build their expectations about the teacher and the classroom through their experiences, and teachers should be aware of their attire and select clothing that deliberately give rises to the impression they seek to create.

Prior research indicated that a teacher's attire can influence student academic performance (Sampson, 2016; Simmons, 1996; Workman & Freeburg, 2010). The findings of this study support the earlier research. However, a broader picture must be painted if the implications of this research are to be grasped. As a primary agent of change, teachers at the middle school level should be role models for their students as well as other professionals, both in general and in their choice of attire, in particular. As Helterbran (2008) noted,

Good teachers are never content with their teaching capability: there remains a hunger to stretch and grow. They incredibly seek for self-improvement and advancement. Effective teachers maximize the profit of a course by using new techniques, methods, and approaches or they combine their own system in accordance with the level, age, sex, and the cultural background of their students. (Helterbran, p. 15)

Teachers who understand that students can be influenced by their attire may decide on their own that it is time for a change. The goal is to have a strong corps of credible teachers who maintain authority and command respect from students as well as others in the teaching profession. Until then, school districts across the country may curtail the freedom of teachers wearing whatever they desire.

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Appendix A: IRB Approval



DATE: June 12, 2018

TO: Gwendolyn Ivery, Doctorate

FROM: Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB)

PROJECT TITLE: [1202080-2] Teacher perception on the Effect Their Attire Has on Student Behavior.

REFERENCE #: EDD-20180423-Parsons-Ivery

SUBMISSION TYPE: Response/Follow-Up

ACTION: APPROVED

APPROVAL DATE: June 12, 2018

EXPIRATION DATE: June 6, 2019

REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

Thank you for your submission of Response/Follow-Up materials for this project. The Concordia University–Portland IRB (CU IRB) has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio, and a project design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission. Attached is a stamped copy of the approved consent form. You must use this stamped consent form.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the project and insurance of participant understanding, followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the project via a dialogue between the researcher and the research participant. Federal regulations require that each participant receives a copy of the consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this committee prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All UNANTICIPATED PROBLEMS involving risks to subjects or others (UPIRSOs) and

SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported promptly to this office. Please use the appropriate reporting forms for this procedure. All FDA and sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

All NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this project must be reported promptly to this office.

This project has been determined to be a Minimal Risk project. Based on the risks, this project requires continuing review by this committee on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate forms for this procedure. Your documentation for continuing review must be received with sufficient time for review and continued approval before the expiration date of June 6, 2019.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years after the completion of the project.

Appendix B: Introductory E-mail to Participants in the “Northeastern School District”

My name is Gwendolyn Ivery, [redacted] . I am currently working on my dissertation at Concordia University. In order to meet my Doctorate requirement and conduct research, I must secure permission from the Superintendent and the Principal, where the research is intended to take place. The research study title is **Understanding Perception: How Teacher Attire Impacts Academic Success at the Middle School Level.**

Purpose and what participants will be doing:

The purpose of this interview is to investigate the perceptions expressed by middle school teachers regarding the effects that professional attire has on middle school students’ behavior and learning. We expect approximately 15 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. Since teachers will be hard at work in August, preparing for the students and finishing their Summer professional development courses, I would like to begin enrollment on September 15, 2018, with a start date of October 1. The study will last approximately four (4) weeks.

Study Procedures:

If participants agree to be in this study, they will be asked to:

- Sign a consent form.
- Participate in an hour face-to-face interview session.
- Have interviews audio recorded.
- Review individual transcripts for accuracy of interview
- Agree to two (2) observations by the researcher

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. Any personal information provided will be coded so it cannot be linked to an individual. Any name or identifying information will be kept securely via electronic encryption or locked inside the closet. When we or any of our investigators look at the data, none of the data will have your name or identifying information. We will only use a secret code to analyze the data. Identification will not be a part of any public report. Information will be kept private at all times, and then all study documents will be destroyed 3 years after we conclude this study.

Benefits:

It is possible that some participants will benefit directly from their participation by gaining knowledge or insight into how their attire has the capability to affect a student’s behavior in an educational setting.

A Response can be sent via email for approval to: [redacted]

I have also attached all forms required for consideration.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration

Appendix C: Informed Consent Form

Middle School Teachers Request to Participate in Research Study

Research Study Title: Understanding Perception: How Teacher Attire Impacts Academic Success at the Middle School Level

Principal Investigator: Gwendolyn Ivery

Research Institution: Concordia University

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Brianna Parsons

Purpose and what you will be doing:

The purpose of this interview is to investigate the perceptions expressed by middle school teachers regarding the effects that professional attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning. We expect approximately 15 volunteers. No one will be paid to be in the study. I will begin enrollment on October 29, 2018, and end enrollment on November 15, 2018. To be in the study, you will need to be willing to commit 4 weeks of participation.

Study Procedures:

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Sign a consent form
- Participate in an hour face-to-face interview session
- Have interviews audio recorded
- Review individual transcripts for accuracy of interview.
- Two (2) Observation by researcher

Risks:

There are no risks to participating in this study other than providing your information. However, we will protect your information. I will record the interviews. The recording will be transcribed by me, the principal investigator, and the recording will be deleted when the transcription is completed. Any data you provide will be coded so people who are not the investigator cannot link your information to you. Any name or identifying information you give will be kept securely via electronic encryption on my password protected computer locked inside the cabinet in my office. The recording will be deleted as soon as possible; all other study documents will be kept secure for 3 years and then be destroyed.

Benefits:

It is possible that some participants will benefit directly from their participation by gaining knowledge or insight into how their attire has the capability to affect a student's behavior in an educational setting.

Confidentiality:

This information will not be distributed to any other agency and will be kept private and confidential. The only exception to this is if you tell us abuse or neglect that makes us seriously concerned for your immediate health and safety.

Right to Withdraw:

Your participation is greatly appreciated, but we acknowledge that the questions we are asking are personal in nature. You are free at any point to choose not to engage with or stop the study. You may skip any questions you do not wish to answer. This study is not required, and there is no penalty for not participating. If at any time you experience a negative emotion from answering the questions, we will stop asking you questions.

Contact Information:

You will receive a copy of this consent form. If you have questions, you can talk to or write the principal investigator Gwendolyn Ivery at [redacted]. If you want to talk with a participant advocate other than the investigator, you can write or call the director of our institutional review board, Dr. Ora Lee Branch (email obranch@cu-portland.edu or call 503-493-6390).

Your Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I asked questions if I had them, and my questions were answered. I volunteer my consent for this study.

_____	_____
Participant Name	Date
_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
<u>Gwendolyn Ivery</u>	<u>010/27/18</u>
Investigator Name	Date
_____	_____
Investigator Signature	Date



Investigator: Gwendolyn Ivery email: [redacted]
c/o: Professor Dr. Brianna Parsons
Concordia University–Portland
2811 NE Holman Street
Portland, Oregon 97221

Appendix D: Interview Guide

Good afternoon. Just to start off, please understand that your name will be kept in strict confidentiality. You will be assigned a number that will reflect this interview. All transcribed data will be deleted after it is analyzed, and there is no wrong or right way to answer the questions.

Opening Questions:

1. How many years have you been teaching?
2. What is your educational background?

Questions:

- Q₁: What is your description of professional attire for teachers?
- Q₂: What do you think your professional attire says about you as an educator?
- Q₃: In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students' behavior in middle school?
- Q₄: In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students' learning in school?

Looking at your observations, can you please share some of the reflections you made when you dressed in what you considered "professional attire."

Did you notice the student's reactions?

What else did you notice?

Closing:

If you had your choice, what would you declare as professional attire for teachers, and would this be all-inclusive, what would be the exceptions?

Appendix E: Observation Protocol

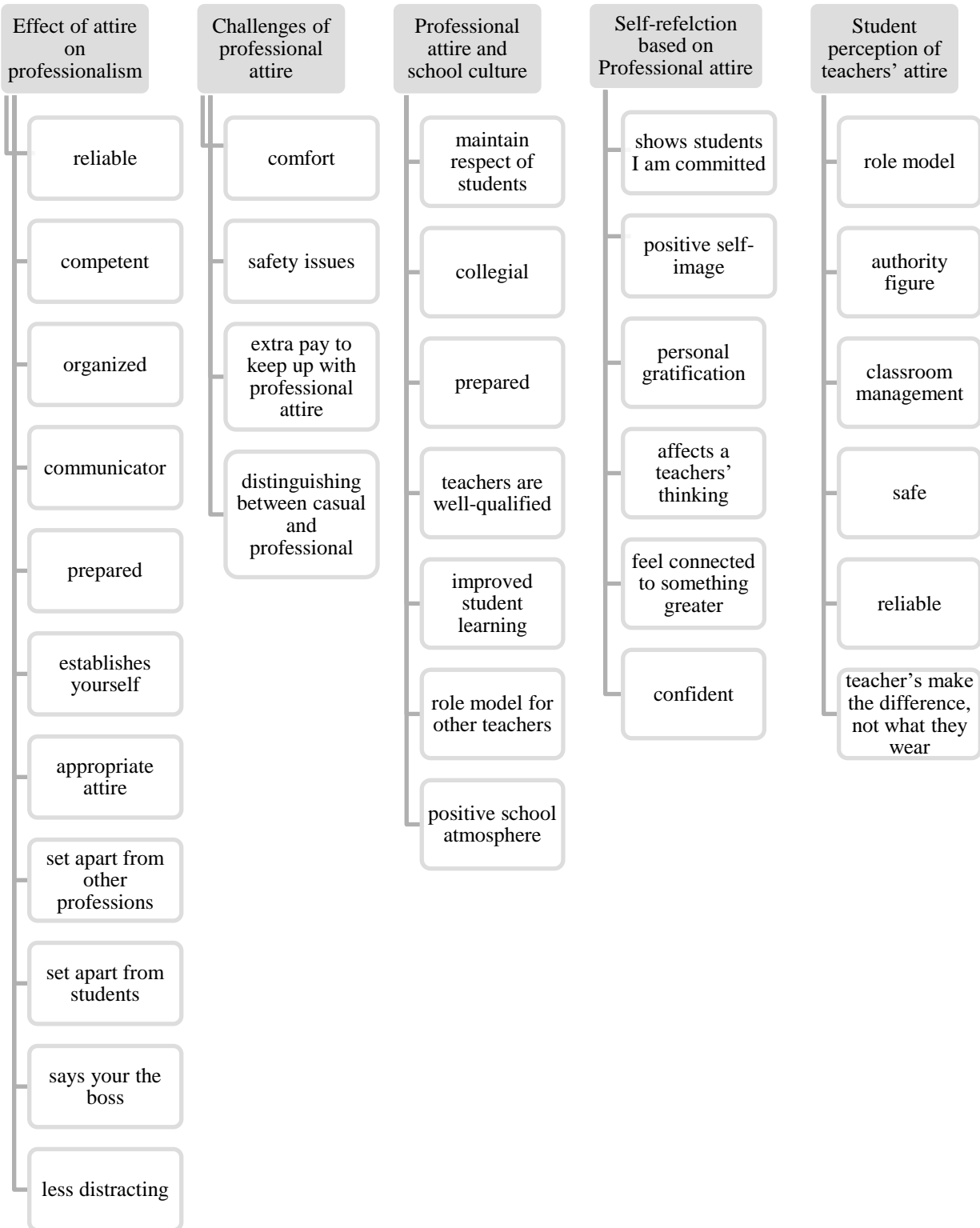
LOGISTICS

Evaluator Name:	Gwendolyn Ivery
Event Name:	Professional Attire Observation
Event Date/Time:	
Event Participants:	

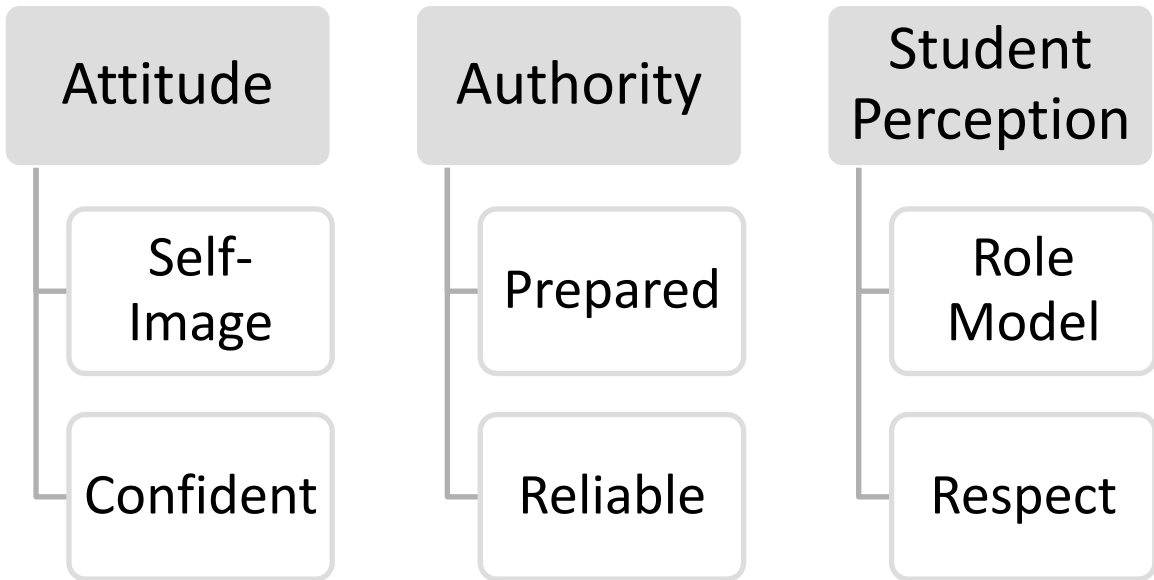
NOTES ON AGENDA/OUTCOMES

Question 1	Please provide any background to help understand the environment, as well as what your attire consisted of for your observation day.
Response:	
Question 2	Did you notice any difference in student behavior of the during the observation day? If so, what was the difference and which type of clothing were you wearing?
Response	
Question 3	Did students ask questions about the way you were dressed during the study? If so, what were they?
Response	
Question 4	In what ways do you feel your professional attire influences students study? Provide any other information that you think was relevant for this observation.
Response	

Appendix F: Themes–Interview



Themes–Observations



Appendix G: Statement of Original Work

The Concordia University Doctorate of Education Program is a collaborative community of scholar-practitioners, who seek to transform society by pursuing ethically-informed, rigorously- researched, inquiry-based projects that benefit professional, institutional, and local educational contexts. Each member of the community affirms throughout their program of study, adherence to the principles and standards outlined in the Concordia University Academic Integrity Policy. This policy states the following:

Statement of academic integrity.

As a member of the Concordia University community, I will neither engage in fraudulent or unauthorized behaviors in the presentation and completion of my work, nor will I provide unauthorized assistance to others.

Explanations:

What does “fraudulent” mean?

“Fraudulent” work is any material submitted for evaluation that is falsely or improperly presented as one’s own. This includes, but is not limited to texts, graphics and other multi-media files appropriated from any source, including another individual, that are intentionally presented as all or part of a candidate’s final work without full and complete documentation.

What is “unauthorized” assistance?

“Unauthorized assistance” refers to any support candidates solicit in the completion of their work, that has not been either explicitly specified as appropriate by the instructor, or any assistance that is understood in the class context as inappropriate. This can include, but is not limited to:

- Use of unauthorized notes or another’s work during an online test
- Use of unauthorized notes or personal assistance in an online exam setting
- Inappropriate collaboration in preparation and/or completion of a project
- Unauthorized solicitation of professional resources for the completion of the work.

Statement of Original Work (continued)

I attest that:

1. I have read, understood, and complied with all aspects of the Concordia University–Portland Academic Integrity Policy during the development and writing of this dissertation.
2. Where information and/or materials from outside sources has been used in the production of this dissertation, all information and/or materials from outside sources has been properly referenced and all permissions required for use of the information and/or materials have been obtained, in accordance with research standards outlined in the *Publication Manual of The American Psychological Association*.

Digital Signature

Gwendolyn Ivery

Name (Typed)