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Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Their Attire on Middle-School Students' Behavior and Learning

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Elizabeth Sampson

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Walden University
2016

Abstract

Teachers' Perceptions of the Effect of Their Attire on
Middle-School Students' Behavior and Learning

by

Elizabeth Clemons Sampson

M.A., Valdosta State University, 1987

B.S., Albany State University, 1974

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree of
Doctor of Education

Walden University

February 2016

Abstract

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Teachers were once held to a professional dress code. This code has become lax, resulting in teachers dressing in more casual attire. A local middle school in rural Georgia was experiencing complaints about teachers' unprofessional attire from other teachers, administrators, and parents. Teachers play an integral role in modeling cultural and behavioral norms for students, of which professional dress is one. The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore local middle school teachers' perceptions of the impact of their professional work attire on students' behavior and learning. Bandura's social learning and cognitive theories provided the theoretical framework for this study. Data were collected from 10 certified teachers at the local site, representing varying backgrounds and tenure, using individual semi-structured interviews. Interview data were open coded and thematically analyzed. The findings indicated that local teachers perceived that professional attire had a positive influence on students' learning and behavior and that students appear to model teachers who were professionally attired. Implications for positive social change include improved awareness at the local site about how teacher attire may influence students. This awareness may motivate teachers to consider their professional attire as a possible positive influence on students' behavior and learning.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to my late husband, Coach Matthew Sidney Sampson (“Pop”), who supported me in this endeavor. I thank him for encouraging me each day. Most of all I thank him for his love and devotion.

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Section 1: Introduction to the Study

Background

Teachers' attire has become less professional and more informal in the past decade and a half. The wearing of informal attire (e.g., jeans, t-shirts, and flip flops) by teachers has become prevalent.

Through the views of certified teachers in a rural middle school located in southeast Georgia, this study explored teachers' perceptions regarding the effect of their attire on students' behavior and learning. Attire and appearance are forms of nonverbal communication that include an individual's values, attitudes, interests, lifestyle, and social and personal relationships (Dixon, 2007). The cultural and social significance of teachers' attire has been of interest to researchers for a number of years (Carr, Davies, & Lavin, 2009). Morris (as cited in Carr et al.), a human behaviorist, posited that attires worn by individuals send social signals. Jewell (2010) surmised that the teacher's appearance can affect the attitude of students and that teachers' attire can influence the respect given to teachers by students. The wearing of professional attire by teachers is an important component in the positive enhancement of the school climate. Section 2 of this study is a review of literature concerning the importance of professional attire for middle-school teachers.

Maintaining a professional image is important in the teaching profession. The results of a study conducted by Saiki (2006) revealed that teachers who dressed in a professional manner 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). Some students and teachers believe that clothing has an effect on individuals (Sternberg, 2006).

Individuals tend to assess attributes of competence and intelligence based on appearance. The key ingredients of making a good impression are knowledge, preparation, and appearance (McKay, 2009). Carr et al. (2009) pointed out that clothing has communicative power, and the attire of a teacher is an expressive factor that is as significant as verbal messages; therefore, the attire of a teacher projects an image that influences the mind and attitudes of students before teaching begins. The teachers' influence as a source of knowledge and as a mentor may be dependent upon how the teacher's attire is perceived (Carr et al.).

Problem Statement

The professional attire of teachers in a rural middle school in southeast Georgia has become informal since the beginning of the 21st century and could be a hindrance for students' behavior and learning in that school. In that middle school, the professional attire plan was vague and had not been evaluated in 4 years. Consequently, it had not been determined if the plan successfully encouraged teachers to dress professionally. The school district's professional attire plan for teachers stated that teachers were expected to be professionally attired daily because teaching, as a profession, demands setting an admirable example for students. According to the participating school district's HR director, there had been a consistent downward trend in the professional attire of teachers since the beginning of the 21st century. The lack of professional attire had been

addressed in meetings of principals and the Board of Education, but the discussions concluded without a workable solution. According to the HR director, complaints about teachers' unprofessional attire had been received from parents, teachers, and administrators. Some parents expressed that unprofessionally-attired teachers might not be competent in their teaching ability. Workman and Freeburg (2010) affirmed that teachers fill important positions in society, and their attire contributes to the fulfillment of their role and professional identity. As representatives of the schools, teachers are integral in transmitting to the nation's youth what is deemed by the mainstream population to be valuable cultural knowledge, moral values, and behavioral norms (Workman & Freeburg).

This qualitative case study explored the perceptions voiced by middle-school teachers regarding the effects that professional attire has on middle-school students' behavior and learning. A lack of adherence to a professional attire standard by teachers has been a concern in a great number of schools (Brownstein, 2010). Many teachers are not aware of the influence that their appearance has on the educational environment and students; however, teachers are professionals and role models, and students' perceptions are important. The results of a study by 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 attire they wear in the classroom.

Several schools acknowledged an increase in the number of teachers who were unprofessionally attired. Brownstein (2010) noted that a growing dissatisfaction with how

teachers dress for work has become a great concern. Research relating to professionally-attired teachers and their effect and influence on middle-school students' behavior and learning is extremely limited. Section 2 of this study is a review of current literature, which explains the significance of teachers' professional attire in the middle school and validates the overall impact, effect, and importance of professionally-attired teachers in schools and in society.

Nature of the Study

This case study contributes to the knowledge that is necessary to address the influence and perceptions of teachers' professional attire on the behavior and learning of middle-school students. The case study approach provided a useful process for understanding human experiences and meaning and, in this study, allowed for interaction with the teachers in the school environment. This design offers commitment and openness to learn, respect for the participants, and facilitates a better understanding of the experience being explored (Merriam, 2002).

Interpretation refers to the perspective of one set of data from the researcher, the interpretation of the data from the participants, and data from the literature (Creswell, 2007). The data in this study were analyzed and sorted to determine the influence and perceptions that middle-school teachers' professional attire has on students' behavior and learning in the participating middle school. Face-to-face interviews were used to obtain data for this case study. The methodology is discussed in Section 3.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to determine teachers' perceptions of the influence of their professional attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning in one rural middle school in southeast Georgia. To determine whether teachers perceived professional attire as being an important factor in influencing students' behavior and learning in the designated middle school, I explored the personal opinions and perceptions of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade teachers. In addition, this study brought awareness to teachers regarding the significance of their attire and the importance it plays in the school's culture and society. Professionally-attired teachers are role models for students, other teachers, administrators, and parents.

Research Questions

In this study I explored the following two research questions through face-to-face interviews with teachers:

- RQ1: How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects middle-school students' behavior in the educational environment?
- RQ2: How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects students' learning?

Conceptual Framework

Teachers' professional attire is significant in the middle school, as well as in society. Bandura's (1977, 2008) social learning theory encompassed the aspects of individuals learning from others. This qualitative case study on teachers' perceptions of the effect their professional attire has on middle-school students' behavior and learning

was framed by Bandura's social learning theory to retrieve information from real life experiences.

The conceptual framework for this study was based on Bandura's (1977, 2008) belief that individuals learn from each other via observations, imitation, and modeling. The personal and social values of teachers are significant and are communicated through attire and appearance. The attire of teachers is highly visible, and others formulate opinions of them from visual cues provided by that attire (Miller, 2004). The perception of teachers' attire in the middle-school environment is important, and this understanding was an integral component of this study. The social learning theory expounds on individuals' behavior in terms of continuous, reciprocal interaction between behavior and environmental influences, meaning one's environment causes one's behavior (Bandura, 2008). Miller (2004) pointed out that appropriate attire can create a difference in appearing effective on the job, and attire can either facilitate or hinder human interaction. Most important, attire is a powerful communicator.

Wong and Wong (2005, 2009) acknowledged that the attire of a teacher contributes to the perceptiveness and the receptiveness of students. Students notice how teachers dress in the same way they notice the appropriateness of their own attire and that of their peers. Attire influences the respect that students have for a teacher, and respect is necessary if optimal learning is to take place. Research on attire worn by teachers has shown that it affects the work, attitude, and discipline of students. According to Wong and Wong, teachers should dress for four main effects: (a) respect, (b) credibility, (c) acceptance, and (d) authority (2005, p. 55). Acquisition of the foregoing traits prepares a

teacher to have a greater influence on students. An effective teacher applies those traits as assets in relating to students, other teachers, administrators, parents, and society (Wong & Wong, 2009).

Observing and modeling the behaviors of others are important factors that are emphasized by the social learning theory. This theory explains the continuous interaction between human behaviors, cognitive behaviors, and environmental influences (Bandura, 1977, 2008). Bandura found that learning would be difficult and perilous if individuals relied solely on their actions. Most behaviors are learned observationally through modeling. Observing others is one form of how new behaviors are formulated and serves as a guide for action in related circumstances (Bandura, 2008).

Bandura's (1989, 2008) social cognitive theory emphasizes the changes and the lifelong development process in the psychosocial functioning of adults, as well as those occurring in childhood. The social cognitive theory emphasizes personal factors and environmental determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. Reciprocal causation does not influence all factors simultaneously. Bandura (1977, 2008) further stated that causal factors exert their influence and activate reciprocal influence over a period of time. Social status and observable characteristics of individuals can affect the social environment before they say or do anything. Social reactions can affect the recipients' perceptions of themselves and others in ways that either strengthen or alter the environment (Bandura, 1989, 2008). Social cognition relates to the foundation of perception that an individual uses to make judgments about others, and refers to how individuals form impressions of others and how they relate to themselves (Dixon, 2007).

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are used in this study:

Appearance: Synonymous with dress (Freeburg & Workman, 2008). According to Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992), dress is the covering and ornaments that are the total décor of the human body. Appearance is nonverbal, personal, and social communication poise (Dixon, 2007). Appearance of professional teachers is an exhibited behavior that is a quality of professionalism (Tichenor & Tichenor, 2009). Professional appearance has a significant influence on the educational accomplishment of individuals (Sabasten & Bristow, 2008), and professional appearance is a professional behavior that has a positive impact on students' perceptions of teachers (Carr et al., 2009).

Attire: The total covering of the human body (Dixon, 2007; Spores & Burnes, 1994, p. 7). Appropriate dress promotes professional image. Professional attire is appropriate dress in a conventional business setting such as men's and women's suits, dresses, dress shirts, and dress pants (Texas Department of Criminal Justice, 2010).

Perception: The viewpoint of an individual toward a person, ideas, or an object (Parry, 2010).

Professionalism: The internalized belief that includes attitude, attributes, values, role behavior, and obligations. Professionalism is revealed when teachers accept the challenges to teach (Phelps, 2006). Teachers' professionalism refers to the demonstration of students' learning in specific context areas that include knowledge, attitude, skills, and habits (Freeburg & Workman, 2008). Societal purpose and obligation, ethical foundation,

and standards for the entire profession are characteristics of professionalism (Hetherbran, 2008).

Social change: The social behavior or the social relations of society. Social change affects individuals that have shared values (Vector-Study, 2011). Social change is the collective transformation of individuals within society (Patil, 2012).

Standard professional attire: Being appropriately dressed in a dark-colored business suit, tie, and dark shoes for men, and professional pants or skirts, low-heeled shoes, and hosiery for women. Professional attire is expected to be worn every day, with the exception of *dress down* or business casual days. During dress down days, instead of a suit, men may wear a sports jacket with a polo shirt and slacks, and women's attire includes knit slacks with a blouse (Jones, 2011).

Unprofessional attire: Immodest dress (Workman & Freeburg, 2010) that includes necklines that are too revealing and apparel that is too short and/or too tight. Additional items included clothing such as t-shirts, midriff tops, workout attire, and underwear worn on the outside of clothing (Farr, 2010).

Assumption

This case study was conducted with middle-school teachers at one designated school in southeast Georgia. It was assumed that the existing professional attire plan was unsuccessful in encouraging teachers to dress professionally. It was assumed that the data collected for this study would provide information to (a) improve teachers' attitudes toward the wearing of professional attire, (b) emphasize that professional attire positively impacts students' behavior and learning in the educational environment, and (c) begin an

ongoing process toward professionalism in appearance. It also was assumed that middle-school teachers would provide direct and sincere responses for this study.

Scope, Delimitations, and Limitations

This case study had specific limitations and delimitations. The participants in this study were limited to sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade certified teachers. The outcome of this study was limited to the participating middle school and the responses of its teachers. The merit of the data was limited by the responses to the interviews.

The population for the study was delimited to a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. The acquisition of data was delimited to the middle school designated for this study. This study was delimited to specific questions that probed for data during face-to-face interviews.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant because it raises awareness about the perceptions of teachers with regard to the effect that their attire had on the behavior and learning of middle-school students. Additionally, this study was important in that it brings awareness to teachers of the importance of professional attire and promotes positive social growth in the school and in society. Hopefully, this study will bring awareness to the significance and influence that the attire of teachers has in the middle school and in its cultures.

The attire of teachers appears to be an issue in schools throughout the United States. Professionally-attired teachers seem to be a minority population in schools. Teachers who are professionally attired are perceived as being more significant in the classroom and, most important, may have a positive effect on the attitudes and learning

outcomes of the students (Jewell, 2010). Limited information has been written on the subject; however, professional attire is of major importance in winning respect in the classroom, and conveying the appropriate public image of what occurs in schools (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). This study investigated the perceptions of teachers regarding the effect that their attire had on middle-school students' behavior and learning.

In the 1960s, administrators and teachers looked professional—women's attire was stylish, and men wore jackets and ties (Wilks, 2008). Educators should know that personal grooming and clothing send messages that can effectively attract respect. Inappropriately dressed administrators and teachers might be perceived as displaying very little respect for the educational mission of the school and the students who are there to learn (Wilks, 2008).

According to one study, teachers' appearance was associated with their magnitude of efficiency and influence (Saiki, 2006). Saiki (2006) and Workman (1984) noted that teachers who dress professionally are perceived as credible, smart, and prepared. Underwood, Kenner, and McCune (as cited in Saiki, 2006) surveyed high school principals' perception of teachers in different attire and found that teachers who are professionally attired are overwhelming, professional, responsible, and confident. As a result of the survey, the authors encouraged the teachers to attend a program to assist them in dressing for professional success. McTamane (as cited in McMahel, 2006), director of the Elementary Education Program at Peabody College (the education school at Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee), asserted that teachers are role models for students, and exemplify professionalism in appearance. Teachers' attire is reflected in

the poise and competency of the academic setting, and professional attire has a significant influence on the educational accomplishment of individuals (McDonald, 2008; Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). A study on teachers' attire conducted by Carr et al. (2009) revealed that academic appraisals of teachers are commonplace. Professional dress can be a factor in obtaining a favorable evaluation, job retention and, ultimately, the awarding of tenure.

The professional attire of teachers establishes the tone of the academic setting (Delisio, 2008). Earl, a teacher of business etiquette at Cornell University, stated that, "professional attire sends messages of inspiration to students. Inappropriateness in attire is a hindrance for advancement; contrarily, professionally-attired individuals increased advancement in multiple areas" (MacIntyre, 2008). Dressing professionally increases the confidence of an administrator in a teacher's ability in the classroom. In many schools, dressing professionally is a requirement under the teachers' dress code. Welmers, the Assistant Superintendent of Human Resources in the New Haven County District in North Carolina, acknowledged that creating a focus on professionalism and modeling high standards of personal conduct helps teachers establish and maintain a more effective and positive learning environment for students (as cited in MacIntyre).

It has been said that expertise, the perceptions of others concerning the commitment of teachers, and the overall ability of teachers should not be dampened by the teachers' attire. As educators, teachers should be attired as well as, or better than, others in the same position. Appropriate attire should be a significant investment by teachers for their careers and the students they teach (McIntosh, 2009).

Summary

Section 1 was a discussion of the foundation for this study. The decline in teachers' professional attire and the perceived deterioration of professionalism in those who teach in the middle school have increased since the beginning of the 21st century. Attire and appearance are forms of nonverbal communication that include an individual's values, attitudes, interests, lifestyle, and social and personal relations (Dixon, 2007). Maintaining a professional image is important in the teaching profession. The purpose of this case study was to probe for teachers' perceptions and the effective dimensions of teachers' professional attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning and on the teaching profession. Section 2 is a review of the literature on professional attire and appearance, perception of attire, impact of attire, and social change.

Section 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this qualitative case study was to explore how teachers perceive the influence of their attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning in a rural middle school located in southeast Georgia. The decline in teachers wearing professional attire and the deterioration of professionalism has escalated in the middle school in the last decade. This section reviews the following topics: (a) professional attire and appearance, (b) perception of attire, (c) impact of attire, and (d) professional attire and social change.

The literature that was reviewed was limited mainly to the 2005–2012 timeframe and was comprised of articles from peer-reviewed scholarly journals, as well as webpages from the World Wide Web. I searched databases such as ProQuest Dissertations and Theses, ProQuest Educational Journals, and Education: Sage Full-Text via Walden University's library. Keywords used in the literature search included *appearance, attire, perception, professionalism, social change, standard professional attire, and unprofessional attire*.

Bandura's (1977, 2008) intentional and unintentional messages concerning the communication of academic learning and social learning are emphasized in the social learning theory. Organizations have conveyed that attire has cultural and social significance (Carr et al., 2009). Appropriate attire has determined the art of social and cultural styles and whether individuals are deemed trustworthy or believable may be influenced by their appearance (Dixon, 2007). The initial impression given by the attire

of teachers is reflected in how individuals judge their ability and professionalism.

Observed conduct and performance often are adopted by students who are imitators of the practices of teachers whom they admire (Immaculate, 2010).

Professional Attire and Appearance

Professional attire is an ongoing topic of concern and is critical to the survival and enhancement of the education profession (Workman & Freeburg, 2008). The attire of an individual presents nonverbal messages that communicate social identity (Johnson, Yoo, Kim, & Lennon, 2008). According to Freeburg and Workman (2008), appearance impacts the professional identity of teachers. The process of observing and making evaluations is based on how individuals look, and the perception of one's appearance is based on the first impression. Some teachers and administrators believe that how teachers' professionalism can be impacted by their appearance should be included in the training of new teachers (Freeburg and Workman).

The Omaha Public School District instituted professional attire and appearance into the performance evaluation for teachers. The magnitude of professional attire was emphasized by the assistant superintendent for human resources (Saunders, 2008). Heatherfield (2009) cited studies by Mehrabian at the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) that explained how appearance is a nonverbal attribute that conveys meaning through one's communication with others and has a significant impact on an individual's professional image. According to Brownstein (2010), teachers' appearance has the potential to produce an extensive range of discussion concerning how they look and behave.

Teachers' professional attire is potentially controversial in the schools; however, it has the greatest effect on a school's climate and culture (Lemos, 2007). Workman and Freeburg (2008) were interested in the numerous stories concerning the displays of teachers' attire. The professors investigated dress guidelines and handbooks in schools, examined dress codes related to teachers, and noted that 90% of the guidelines and handbooks were vague. Most attire guidelines set forth by school districts were not specific concerning the definition of what constituted professional attire and, consequently, teachers have used their own interpretations of professional attire (Flynn, 2008).

Schools have numerous young teachers in the classrooms, and some are not cognizant of the definition of appropriate attire. The attire worn by some teachers in the classrooms is believed to reflect society's increasing acceptance of casual wear (Workman & Freeburg, 2008). Assurance that a teacher's attire is not distracting is an important factor in determining professional attire. Students' attention should not be diverted from class work due to attire worn by teachers.

The wearing of suits by male and female teachers has become less prevalent in the schools. According to some studies, casual wear has become the standard workplace attire due to the influx of younger workers (Delisio, 2006). In an organization, formal professional attire is a written and unwritten code. Professional business attire is the proper dress for business activities and can make a lasting impression. Appropriate business attire for men is a conservative suit in a muted color (i.e., charcoal, navy, or gray) with a white, ecru, or light blue shirt, and polished shoes; for women, it is a

conservative suit with hosiery and matching shoes. Impeccable grooming and proper attire are important to make a lasting favorable impression (Hoover, 2007). Professional business attire silently conveys the message that the teacher is professional and effective in the classroom (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009).

The guidelines for business professional attire and business casual attire are significant for appropriate and influential appearance (Hoover, 2007). Till (2011) noted that there were specific days designated for when casual attire was acceptable, such as theme days and pep rallies. It is essential to the image of the school that administrators create a culture that accepts nothing less than the most professional attire. Appropriate attire is only one of the many ways to express professionalism; however, it is the most conspicuous (Till).

Some school districts have emphasized the importance of teachers' presenting a professional appearance. In one specific case, Springer (2009) revealed that a school district stressed the image of professional attire demonstrated in education. Professional attire for teachers should be held to a higher standard than attire for students and should be worn during the teaching hours and at all school and work related activities (Springer). In another school district, teachers, administrators, and the superintendent assembled to review teachers' attire, and the educators agreed that professional attire for teachers is important and adds dignity to an educational setting (Solocheck, 2007).

The Utah School Boards Association suggested that there was a need for attire guidelines for teachers in the schools because teachers' attire is part of the display of professionalism and helps to reinforce the concept of respect in the public schools. Most

educators realize that they are role models and that their attire sets the atmosphere in classrooms and schools as a whole. Not only are teachers professionals, they are also role models, and there is a societal expectation that they will dress appropriately and in a professional manner (Till, 2011; Toomer-Cook, 2005; Water, 2006).

Because some teachers have worn clothing that was too revealing, some school administrators developed and implemented dress guidelines for teachers. Bill Schaffe, director of bylaws and policy services for the Michigan Association of School Boards, used the term *relaxed* to describe the unprofessional attire of teachers (Feller, 2005). He believed that teachers establish the examples for students in the schools (Feller, 2005). Johnson et al. (2008) explained that the appearance presented by teachers exemplifies social identity. Till (2011) acknowledged that some school districts have banned inappropriate attire for teachers. The guidelines for school staff in Sayreville, New Jersey, do not allow see-through clothing (Delisio, 2006; Till). Inappropriate attire (e.g., halter tops, tank tops, low-cut necklines, see-through clothing, and visible undergarments) are prohibited in the Austin Independent School District (AISD, 2004; Till). In Arizona, the Chandler Unified School District forbids spaghetti straps and skirts more than three inches above the knee (Bland, 2005; Till).

The professional appearance of teachers is important, and there are specific items of clothing that teachers should not wear or display in the classroom. An exposed midriff and/or visible underwear are inappropriate attire for professional teachers in the school environment. Professionally-attired female teachers should be covered from below the collar bone to approximately one inch above the knee. Professional attire reflects how

teachers deem the importance of being a teaching professional (Baxter, Hennings, & Handley, 2009). The appearance and attire of teachers should be in accordance with the standards that are appropriate to the duties with which they are associated. Dressing appropriately is an obligation of the teacher to uphold the good representation of the teaching profession. Thongs, revealing attire, or attire with offensive slogans were inappropriate attire in the school environment (Australian Capital Territory, 2006). Professional attire and accessories promote a working and learning environment that is free of unnecessary disruptions (Springer, 2009).

The Grand Island Public Schools (GIPS, 2009) in Nebraska implemented administrative guidelines for teachers' professional appearance that enabled them to experience the comfort advantages of more casual and relaxed clothing while still projecting a professional image. The reputation of professionalism and the image projected by the teachers was positive for the local and regional districts. The expected standard was business casual dress, but the dress guidelines did not encompass all contingencies. Compliance to standards needs to be enforced by building administrators and/or human resources departments (GIPS).

Because not all casual clothing is suitable for the classroom, the established professional attire guidelines assisted teachers in determining appropriate attire. Clothing such as beach wear, dance club wear, and sportswear are considered not professional attire for the classroom, nor are Bermuda shorts, bib overalls, leggings, and Spandex tights. However, cotton or synthetic material for slacks, pants, and suit pants are acceptable classroom attire. Appropriate attire for the physical education staff includes

sweatpants, exercise pants, wind pants, and jogging suits and must be in excellent condition and free of fading, tearing, and fraying. Attire that displays offensive logos or other symbols is unacceptable (GIPS, 2009).

Portraying an image of professionalism is significant in the educational environment and society, and can be achieved through the use of professional attire (McDonald, 2008). Professional educators' model success with appropriate attire and students learn what appropriate attire is by observing adult role models in society. Teachers who dress appropriately are perceived to be more effective teachers (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009).

Perception of Attire

The academic setting has been the milieu of studies on various aspects of dress. The educational environment is a place of work and learning. Teachers set expectations with appropriate attire and with the expectation that students will measure up to the atmosphere created by teachers. Students will mirror the teachers' professionalism, and may even start dressing for success (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009). Photography of teachers and live models has been used in some cases to reveal the perceptions of some observers on professional attire. Credibility, intelligence, and competency were areas of individuals' perception of professional attire; likeability and approachability were areas that were highly rated (Carr et al., 2009).

A study conducted by Carr et al. (2009) revealed that being organized, knowledgeable, and prepared were characteristics that were attributed to teachers who dressed professionally. Boles (2010) cited studies by Butler and Roesel and Prenni and

Lord regarding students' perception of teachers' attire. The result of the study conducted by Butler and Roesel (as cited in Boles) revealed that students believed professionally-attired teachers were more professional and knowledgeable about the content being taught. Prenni and Lord (as cited in Boles) stated that professionally-attired teachers are perceived to be more successful in the classroom and personally. The quality of life and the choices made by individuals are the foundation of human motivation and accomplishment (Bandura, 2006, 2008). Teachers are perceived and received by appearance, and their attire has an effect on the level of respect that students hold toward teachers. If learning is to take place, teachers must have the respect of the students (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009).

An idea or belief is formed each time an individual observes another, and a positive or negative impression is imprinted instantly on the perceiver's mind. The attire worn by an individual will be perceived differently by the perceivers (Boles, 2010). Appearance is perceived before voice and may be the leading characteristic attributed to teachers (Freeburg, 2008). Research has suggested that the first impression of a teacher's professionalism is derived 55% from that teacher's appearance, 38% from their voice, and 7% what they say (Jones, 2006). Wong & Wong (2005, 2009) reemphasized that one does not get a second chance to make a good first impression. Boles (2010) revealed research by Prenni and Lord who found that 73% of teachers agreed that the professional image of a teacher affects the success of that teacher. A professional appearance is frequently thought to be a perquisite in society, especially in a professional career

(Peluchette, Karl, & Rust, 2006), and may serve as a mastery model for positive attitudes (Kim & Baylor, 2007).

Modeling appropriate attire is a form of nonverbal communication. According to Roberts (as cited in Heard, 2009), a Harvard Business School professor professional appearance is important. Trustworthiness, caring, humility, and capability are character traits that are favorable for professionally-attired teachers (Heard). Flynn (2008) posited that students observe every detail of a teacher's attire; therefore, it is significant that the attire of a teacher portrays an image of professionalism in the learning environment, as well as in society (McDonald, 2008).

To collect data on the perception of teachers' attire in the southwest of Western Australia, focus group interviews were conducted with 240 students from various schools. Several students reported significant perceptions of inappropriate attire of teachers—some teachers were attired in clothing that was too young for their age, and others wore low-cut tops, UGG boots, and track pants (Strikwerda-Brown, Oliver, Hodgson, Palmer, & Watts, 2008).

A quest for excellence once was represented in an individual's dress (Jensen, 2008). The foundation of a positive image of teachers is based on appearances and appropriate attire; consequently, presentation is a significant factor for a first impression. The attire of teachers is a representation of the teaching profession, and a teacher's attire should reflect the characteristics of trustworthiness, professionalism, and competence. Appropriate attire is important to gain the respect and trust of individuals (Sandhu, 2009).

Impact of Attire

Individuals do not function as autonomous agents, and their competence is determined by behavior and their environment. Behavior alters environmental conditions which, in turn, is altered by the condition it creates (Bandura, 2008). Bandura's (1977, 2008) social learning theory emphasizes observational learning, also known as modeling. The modeling process consists of four significant steps:

1. Attention: Individuals must attend to, and perceive accurately during observation of, significant features of the modeled behavior.
2. Retention: Observational learning is retained through imagery models. Association of the observed behavior with an image is easier to recall at a later time.
3. Reciprocation: Individuals have the ability to reproduce the observed skill into actual behavior.
4. Motivation: Observational learning is effective when it is imitated. Individuals are compelled to adopt the modeled behavior if the outcomes are valued. (Bandura, 1977; Kim & Baylor, 2007).

Brownstein (2010) stated that teachers' appearance may help mediate students' behavior. Weber and Mitchell (1995) revealed that teachers' clothing not only is a means of identifying oneself as a teacher, but also is a pedagogical strategy establishing a serious working atmosphere and of exerting control (p. 9). Being a role model is a factor that influences teachers' dress choice for work (Brownstein).

Tabor (2008) referred to a quote by General George Patton to assist in explaining the significant effect of teachers' professional attire in schools and the impact their appearance has on the students and the school environment. Maintaining a professional appearance in the school is a prominent part of education. Professionally-attired teachers demonstrate to students how they care about the way they look and that they are proud of the image they portray. Dressing appropriately is a necessary part of the job that teachers are charged with (Tabor, 2008).

How a person's appearance affects others has been of interest to researchers (Damon et al., 2009). Attire and appearance support a sense of identity and reinforce images held by peers and society. It has been documented that individuals are capable of forming impressions of others based on attire (Dixon, 2007; Johnson, Schofield, & Yurchisin, 2002). The attire of teachers appears to be more significant than ever before, and serves as a model of what is appropriate behavior (Carr et al., 2009). Teachers' attire is significant to the educational settings because teachers influence the atmosphere in the classroom (McBribe, 2009). Respect for teachers begins with appearance (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009), and appropriate attire sends a positive message that may demonstrate to students how to respect themselves (Yenko, 2011).

Attig (2008) affirmed that the appearance of a teacher candidate is compared to the characteristics and identification of cast members of a film or play. As an emerging professional and role model for a school and children, professional attire reinforces the identity of a beginning teacher. The professional appearance of teacher candidates strengthens the identity of the school community and the teacher candidate. Attig

presented astute choices of professional attire for teacher candidates that included (a) suitable attire for the occasion, (b) exemplified positive impression for the school community, (c) displayed professional role modeling for students, and, (d) encouraged a working and learning environment that is conducive for teaching and learning.

According to Hongyi (2010), in an effort to improve teachers' professional image, the Nanjing Education Bureau proposed rules that address teachers' attire. The proposal included stating that teachers' attire should reflect such professional characteristics as elegance and gracefulness as befitting a teacher in the school setting, as well as in the community. The appearance presented by teachers imparts messages to students, parents, and society. Teachers have been important role models in cultivating social etiquette, manners, and models for others to emulate; therefore, teachers must exercise their formative influence in shaping students' lives (Hongyi). According to Brownstein (2010), regulating teachers' appearance has been of importance in recent decades. Brownstein conducted an e-mail survey of principals throughout the United States, which revealed that most schools did not have a formal dress code. However, the principals agreed that teachers' professional attire was essential to show respect for the school and had an affirmative impact on students' behavior.

The attire of teachers is highly visible, and opinions are formulated from visual cues (Miller, 2004). MacIntyre (2008) noted that Diane Pemberton-Sikes, an author and personal consultant, believed that a professionally-attired individual attained superior achievement, whereas an individual who was inappropriately attired did not receive the same evaluation. Inappropriateness in attire was an encumbrance for advancement;

however, professionally-attired individuals excelled in advancement in multiple areas (MacIntyre).

Unprofessionally attired teachers are in the schools and classrooms each day. Certain competencies, principles, and lifestyles are influenced socially in selected environments (Bandura, 2006, 2009). Teachers should dress in professional attire for classroom instruction because professionally-attired teachers are perceived to emulate authority, professionalism, confidence, and expertise (Baker, Comer, & Martinak, 2008). Credibility, likeability, interpersonal attractiveness, and dominance are influenced by professional attire; therefore, professional attire is highly received and conveys status and power (Carr et al., 2009).

According to Cairn (2007), first impressions of classroom teachers are based on appearance and teachers should exemplify authority as they enter the classroom by wearing the appropriate attire. Professional attire is essential for teachers in the classrooms; therefore, teachers' attire should be appropriate for their professional practice. The display of teachers' attire should make a definite distinction between the teachers and the students.

An emerging topic related to the impact that teachers create in the educational environment includes professional appearance (Freeburg & Workman, 2008). Individuals' behavior generally improves when they are appropriately attired, and students may receive the signals of seriousness and civility expressed by the teachers (Jensen, 2008). The results of a study conducted by Carr et al. (2009) revealed that teachers' attire impacts the quality of instruction and that a teacher's appearance is as

significant as the instruction in the classroom; therefore, teachers' attire has social significance and communicative power. Attire influences the perceptions of individuals. Educational level, trustworthiness, and educational background are perceptions of individuals based on attire. Credibility, likability, and interpersonal attractiveness are factors that are influenced by attire (Carr et al., 2009). An individual's attire influences people's perceptions; therefore, teachers should be cognizant that dressing appropriately is essential.

The values and principles of the school should be reflected in the attire of the teachers (Sandhu, 2009). A professionally-attired teacher is likely to be quickly accepted and increase interpersonal effectiveness according to perceptual evidence (Rollman, 2009); teachers' attire affects more than teachers' appearance, Texas Association of School Boards (TASB, 2010) revealed that the professional attire of staff in one school district established excellence in other schools. School administrators identified factors that were enhanced positively by teachers' appearances, including a difference in the level of respect and improved behavior and discipline of students. The administrators credited the positively affected atmosphere of the school to the display of teachers' professional attire (TASB). Bandura's (1997, 2008) social learning theory espoused that the connection of environmental influences and students' behavior is determined by the individuals with whom they interact. The more that students observe and interact with teachers, the more they may be molded into well-behaved individuals in society (Immaculate, 2010).

The presentation of material to students by teachers is significant and information is vital; however, there is more to learning than the presentation of the message the students receive from the teacher (Boles, 2010; Fandt & Ferris, 1990). The attire worn by the teachers in class has an effect on how students receive the teacher (Boles, 2010). Appropriate attire is a quality of role modeling, and the role modeling of teachers transpires in day-to-day interactions in school (Helterbran, 2008). Teachers' attire affects students' work, attitude, and discipline. Respect, credibility, acceptance, and authority are four major effects of teachers' attire, and teachers who encompass these traits are more influential with young people than teachers who are deficient in these traits (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009). Personal attributes are altered by various modes of such social influences as modeling, various modes of social practices, and instructional practices. Physical characteristics, socially conferred roles, and status are elicited reactions from the social environment without affirmation. The social reactions affect individuals, either by strengthening or reducing the environment bias (Bandura, 2008).

To an enormous extent, campus climate and culture have been affected greatly by professional dress guidelines. A much higher respect is commanded when an individual wears business attire rather than casual attire. According to Lemos (2007), authority, professionalism, confidence, and expertise are proper representations of business attire. Professional attire, however, is controversial on school campuses, with instances showing that some teachers prefer casual attire versus professional attire; respect, civility, and simple etiquette are some of the reasons why individuals wear professional attire. The same importance should apply in class (Lemos).

Dixon (2007) and Roach-Higgins and Eicher (1992) revealed that attire has been established as an effective means of communication during social interaction.

Individuals' perceptions often are affected by clothing, and students are impressed with teachers' attire. To remove some of the typical teacher–student barriers, teachers must establish credibility and strive to appear comfortable and at ease in their role (Rollman, 2009). Individuals are more willing to comply with instructions given by people who are perceived to be in authority (Damon et al., 2009).

Professional Attire and Social Change

Weber and Mitchell (1995) noted the impact of teachers' attire on society:

In dressing, we address ourselves, others, and the world. How we clothe ourselves become an integral part of self-identity. How, then, do teachers dress? What are the social contexts within which they operate? How are stereotypes, memories of school, actual experiences, dreams, intentions, complacencies, and frustrations played out through their choices of clothing? (p. 9)

Weber and Mitchell (1995) presented how teachers' attire offers an entrance into the role of the professional teacher, stating that “since the 1980s, the popular media and the professional education print media have disclosed a significant increase in criticism toward the unprofessional attire of teachers” (p. 9). However, during this same time period, there was minimal scholarly inquiry into teachers' professional attire. Social roles and social status are immediate and apparent visual cues when dress and appearance are combined—the highest forms of communication (Dixon, 2007). Stryker (1973) and

Tischler (2007) affirmed that the status of teachers is a socially recognizable position in society (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). Teachers are agents for social change, are seen as natural leaders in society, and are looked upon as being capable of bringing about a particular change in the lives of others (International Labour Organization, n.d.).

Sproles and Burns (1994) described attire as the total covering of the human body (p. 7). Attire communicates the characteristics of the wearer, the relationship of the wearer to others, and the situation in which the wearer is involved. Attire communicates three main messages: (a) personal characteristics, which include attitude, interest, and lifestyle; (b) relationship, such as group membership and group role (occupation and status); and (c) definition of the situation, such as intention to act and orientation (casual or serious) (Dixon, 2007). In an era where individuals' misconduct is scrutinized carefully, acceptable attire for teachers may be a quality that stimulates a desire to strive to perform well and to look professional in a career that is a calling for young men and women to enter (Daigneault, 2009).

Summary

Vygotsky (1978) noted that school is a society in which learners cognitively develop through social interactions (Clabaugh, 2011). Helterbran (2008) reiterated Goodlad, who emphasized that teachers command a fundamental role of deciding what, where, when, and how students learn. The professional attire of teachers is significant in terms of the students' cognitive and social development, the positive perception of teachers, and the position of teachers as role models in the school and in society. A

continuous evaluation of professional conformance is an important factor in maintaining the professional attire of teachers in the teaching profession.

Certain competencies, values, and lifestyles are influenced socially in selected environments (Bandura, 2006). The professional attire and appearance of teachers are significant features in the schools and in society. Teachers' professional attire has a positive effect on the atmosphere of a school (TASB, 2010). Weber and Mitchell (1995) concluded that clothing not only was a means of identifying oneself as a teacher, but also was a pedagogical strategy in itself, a means of commanding respect and order, establishing a serious working atmosphere, and exerting control (p. 64).

In Section 2, I reviewed the literature pertaining to this study. Research regarding the effect of teachers' professional attire on the behavior and learning of middle-school students was investigated. Section 3 provides an explanation of the methodology, research design, research questions, and role of the researcher, the population and selection of participants, the study implementation, the data collection, the data analysis, and the validity of the content.

Section 3: Research Methods and Procedures

Introduction

Teachers' professional attire has become more informal, and teachers' professionalism has deteriorated since the beginning of the 21st century. The unprofessional attire of teachers is prevalent in the middle school. The purpose of this case study was to explore the perceptions of teachers regarding the effect of their attire on the behavior and learning of students in a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. As recommended by Creswell (2007), qualitative research assists researchers in comprehending *lived experiences*, and the procedure for that research involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive engagement to assess patterns and relationships of meaning. Through face-to-face interviews, perceptions' of middle-school teachers were investigated regarding the effect of their attire on students. The central concept in this study was the teachers' perceptions. Professional standards of attire may improve the professional image of teachers. The main goal of requiring professional attire for teachers is to establish a campus persona that represents authority, professionalism, confidence, and expertise (Lemos, 2007).

Research Design

Qualitative case study investigation is a social interaction. My primary goal for this study was to provide insights into teachers' perceptions of the effect of their attire on students' behavior and learning in southeast Georgia. Several methods of research design were considered, but would have been less effective for the purpose of this study. Creswell (2003) noted that case study design allows the researcher to explore in depth a

program that involves one or more individuals, is bounded by time, and allows the researcher to collect detailed information using a data collection procedure over a sustained period of time. This qualitative case study allowed me to interact with the participants by using semistructured questions during face-to-face interviews. Those questions were designed to obtain a deeper understanding of their perspectives concerning the attire of teachers and its impact on middle-school students' behavior and learning. The case study design specifically illuminates and recognizes the phenomenon through the perception of individuals in a situation (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Retrieving data from an individual's perception was significant for understanding subjective experiences and gaining insight into the individual's motivation and action. The case study approach was effective for eliciting the experiences and perceptions of individuals from their own perspective (Baxter & Jack, 2008).

Role of the Researcher

I retired from the teaching profession in 2009. Prior to my retirement, I worked as an elementary teacher in the school district of the middle school in southeast Georgia where the study took place. Some of the teachers at this school are former coworkers. During my tenure, my exposure to, and interaction with, the middle-school teachers at this school were through educational development seminars and workshops. For this study, I assumed the role of investigator and developed the research material used in this study. In addition, I conducted the interviews and conducted the data analysis for this study.

Research Questions

Two research questions were addressed during face-to-face interviews:

RQ1. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects middle-school students' behavior in the educational environment?

RQ2. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects students' learning?

I explained the purpose of this study to the participants prior to the interviews.

Participants were assured of confidentiality and informed that they could decline to answer any questions during the interview. I instructed the participants about the nature of this study, secured permission to conduct the study on the school campus, and obtained consents from each participant to engage in the study. I was the primary data collector, and I retrieved and analyzed all data using analysis and interpretation processes that included transcribing the data gathered through the face-to-face interviews and arranging the data according to the interview questions. The analyses evolved through reading data, obtaining a general sense of the participants' ideas, and reflecting on the overall tone of the participants.

The next step included color coding, organizing the data into segments, categorizing data to find linkages between the data and the research questions, and labeling data with a term based on the actual language of the participants. A coding process to generate a description of the setting, participants, and themes for the analysis was the next interval of the data analysis process. The themes are stated under separate headings in Section 4 of this study. Those themes display multiple perspectives from the

participants, and are supported by diverse quotations, as recommended by Creswell (2003). A description of the participants, the interpretation of the data, and a written report concluded the analysis process.

Member-checking of the interview transcripts was implemented to determine the accuracy of the qualitative findings, and detailed descriptions were used to convey the findings and to present the element of shared experiences. Security and confidentiality were enforced for all of the data and the participants. The data were secured by computer password protection and will be maintained in a locked safe in my home for 5 years; I will be the only one with access to the computer password and the safe.

Population

This qualitative case study was conducted with some of the teaching faculty from a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. The teacher population at the middle school consisted of 55 certified teachers. Because human participants were used for this study, approval from the Walden University Institutional Review Board (IRB) was secured; the approval number is 10-24-130120746.

Selection of Participants

Written permission was required for participation in this qualitative research study. Gaining access to the research setting was one of the first phases of collecting data. Negotiating permission from teachers and district personnel was essential and required, and an informed consent was required for each phase of the research, as recommended by Pion et al. (2011). I solicited authorization from the district administrator (Appendix C) to conduct research on the middle-school campus, as well as permission from the

administrator of the school (Appendix D) and from the participating teachers (Appendix B). I also requested that the teachers be allowed to participate during planning periods. I personally delivered the cooperation letters for permission from the district and school personnel, as well as the consent letters to the teachers. Confidentiality was enforced for each participant; the identity of the participants and the data will not be divulged. Data will be password protected and locked in a locked safe in my home, for which only I have a key.

The participants in this study were comprised of sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade certified teachers from the participating school. A sample of 10 certified middle-school teachers were selected randomly from the pool of teachers who were willing to participate: three sixth-grade teachers, three seventh-grade teachers, and four eighth-grade teachers.

Implementation

The attire of teachers announces to the world that they care about themselves (Wong & Wong, 2005). This qualitative case study focused on the effect of middle-school teachers' professional attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning. Teachers' perceptions of their professional attire are significant for this study. Creswell (2003) presented multiple interactive and humanistic methods to use in qualitative research. Establishing credibility and having a positive rapport with the participants is important in retrieving quality, in-depth data. Participants were assured of confidentiality, and informed that they could decline to answer any questions or terminate their participation at any time without fear or consequence. A set of four semistructured

interview questions (Appendix A) served as the fundamental data collection instrument for the face-to-face interviews.

Data Collection

I collected the data via face-to-face interviews. Prior to the data collection, permission and requisition of consent were essential. Obtaining and securing written permission from Walden University's IRB, 10-24-130120746, the administrator of the school district, and the middle-school principal to conduct research on the middle-school campus, as well as permission to interview teachers prior to data collection was required. Following approval from the IRB, the administrator of the school, and the principal of the middle school, I presented the purpose of the study to each certified middle-school teacher who volunteered for this study.

Various approaches were used to collect and analyze the data. This study followed an approach outlined by Tere (2006). Qualitative data collection and analysis were ongoing and took place simultaneously throughout the data collection process (Tere, 2006). A set of four interview questions (Appendix A) comprised the fundamental data collection instrument. The interview questions were developed by me based on the study research questions and reviewed research literature and data. One hour was allotted for each interview in order for the participants to provide an in-depth discussion of their perceptions. I reflected upon the emerging themes from the data during the course of the data collection. Data from the face-to-face interviews were audio recorded in their entirety, transcribed, and analyzed by me.

Face-to-Face Interviews

Winget (2005) and Weiss (1994) discussed a variety of interviews in qualitative research, including structured, semistructured, and open-ended interviews. Winget noted that the semistructured interview allows the interviewer to further develop and expand upon interesting responses. The *semi* portion of the semistructured interview permits a level of freedom in questions and responses, and the *structure* portion allowed a means to ensure consistency across the interviews. I used the semistructured interview, which involved asking specific questions and allowing a certain amount of divergence from the script.

The participants responded to specific questions (Merriam et al., 2002, p. 13). Prior to the interviews, I reviewed the purpose of this study with the participants, expressed that confidentiality was enforced, and reiterated that they could refuse to answer any question without fear of reprisal. A set of four interview questions (Appendix A) were posed to the teachers. A sample of 10 certified middle-school teachers participated in the face-to-face interviews: three sixth-grade teachers, three seventh-grade teachers, and four eighth-grade teachers. I conducted each interview session in a 1-hour time frame, and after each question was asked, the teachers were allotted time to think, process thoughts, and respond to the questions. I elicited detailed information and allowed each participant to elaborate on each answer.

Reliability and Validity

This study followed one of the procedures explained by Mays and Pope (2000) to verify reliability and validity. Mays and Pope noted that comparing data from two or more sources may confirm reliability and validity. I compared the data of two or more interviews to validate consistency of the participants' answers, and secured the data from each interview question (Winget, 2005).

Reliability and validity are essential and are seen as strengths of the qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Member-checking was one of the strategies implemented to determine accuracy of the qualitative findings (Creswell, 2003). The participants reviewed the transcripts to determine accuracy of the data, and were permitted to make changes as needed. One other strategy was implemented to verify reliability and validity, and consisted of using rich, thick descriptions of the data (Creswell, 2003).

Data Analysis

In this qualitative case study, I analyzed data from the interviews to reveal the effect of teachers' professional attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning in the designated middle school. The analysis of the teachers' descriptions and perceptions generated data that was recorded, documented, and analyzed. Marshall and Rossman (2006) provided views of social phenomena research that included managing, analogizing, and interpreting data. Qualitative case study research typically involves textual analysis for which events are recorded, accompanied by interviews, and the data is then analyzed.

According to Creswell (2003), data analysis is an ongoing process that involves continual reflection on the data and taking notes throughout the study. I followed Creswell's tenets on data analysis and interpretation for clarity on the analysis process for this study. The first step was to transcribe the data from the face-to-face interviews, and then arrange the data according to the interview questions. The second step involved reading through the data to obtain a general sense of information and then reflecting upon the overall meaning of the ideas of the participants and on the overall tone of those ideas. The third step was to color code and organize the data into segments to be categorized to find linkages between the data and the research questions. Following categorization, the data were labeled with terms that were based on the actual language of the participants. The fourth step entailed a coding process to generate a description of the setting, the participants, and the themes for the analysis. The themes appear under separate headings in Section 4 and display multiple perspectives of the participants as supported by direct quotations. Step 5 consisted of a description of the participants; Step 6 included interpretation of the data. Concluding the analysis was a written report that linked the research findings of the literature, face-to-face interviews, and Bandura's theoretical framework.

Content Validity

Content validity is the degree to which a study assesses the specific ideas that the researcher attempts to measure. Validity refers to the study's success at measuring what the researcher sets out to measure (Colorado State University, 2011). In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument; therefore, the research depends on the ability

and effort of the researcher (Nayab, 2011). To establish validity for the data in this study, I looked for meaning in the data, as well as repetition and redundancy. Additionally, I determined whether there were patterns to the data, and whether I matched the data with the emerging meaning. I then took the meaning and imposed it back on the data to see whether it held up. I demonstrated validity by showing that the data were collected in a thorough and authentic manner; rigor in analysis explained alternative, competing meanings. This audit allows others to see the integrity of the process, and the ability to explain competing findings demonstrates the validity of the case study perspectives, as noted by Merriam et al. (2002, p. 21).

Qualitative research data were retrieved by means of face-to-face interviews (Nayab, 2011). Qualitative research consists of verbal and textual data (Porter, 2007). This qualitative study employed techniques that included variations of documented literature on the perceived effect of professional attire of teachers on students' behavior and learning. During the face-to-face interviews, four questions were used to generate information from sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade certified teachers regarding their perceptions of the effect of teachers' professional attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning. Three certified teachers from Grade 6, three certified teachers from Grade 7, and four certified teachers from Grade 8 were selected at random. Random selection is a procedure used to select a sampling of individuals from a population for a study (Trochin, 2006). Each face-to-face interview was audio recorded in its entirety and translated by me. According to Court (2006), the objectives of a qualitative study are to arrive at a true description and interpretation of the lives of the individuals studied.

Summary

This section detailed the methodology of the study. Components included the introduction, research design, research questions, role of the researcher, participant population, selection of participants, data collection, data analysis, and reliability and validity. The results of this study are outlined in Section 4.

Section 4: Presentation and Analysis

Process

Section 4 describes the research design, the participant selection process, the description of the participants, and the procedures for data collection and analysis. Data analysis was accomplished through multiple readings of the findings and examination of the data for themes. The data collection was conducted on November 18 and 20, 2013, following the approval from Walden University's IRB, the district administrator (Appendix C), and the middle-school principal (Appendix D).

Research Design

Qualitative case study research is a method that uses a holistic perspective to gain an in-depth understanding of the social phenomenon under investigation. This qualitative investigation is interpretative research wherein the researcher is involved in a sustained, intensive experience with the participants (Creswell, 2003). The qualitative case study design explores an issue from the prospective of one or more individuals, and is bound by time, which allows the researcher to collect detailed information (Creswell, 2003). This study explored the perceptions of middle-school teachers regarding the effect of their attire on the behavior and learning of middle-school students. The case study research design was appropriate for this study because it was conducted in a middle school in southeast Georgia.

Data Collection

The data collection process was initiated after obtaining approval from Walden University's IRB, the administrator of the school district (Appendix C), and the middle-

school principal (Appendix D). Participant selection was based on the criteria I established for purposive sampling, as recommended by Creswell (2003). Study participants were required to be certified teachers who taught sixth-, seventh-, or eighth-grade subjects at the participating middle school. Ten certified middle-school teachers were randomly selected.

Each randomly-selected teacher participated in the semistructured face-to-face interviews. Participants were briefed individually on the purpose of the study, and the interview procedure. The consent form was signed by the participants and by me, and a copy of the consent form was given to each participant. There was no specific order for the participants to engage in the semistructured face-to-face interviews; I arranged to accommodate the participants during their planning period or during school hours as their schedules permitted. One hour was allotted for each interview, and each selected teacher participated.

All interviews were audio recorded. Member-checking and the support of a learning director of a local college were implemented to ensure accuracy of the data, as recommended by Creswell (2003). I transcribed the data, which are stored on my computer with password protection, and a copy is stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Only I have access to the password and the locked cabinet.

Participant Profiles

In a rural middle school in southeast Georgia, 10 certified teachers expounded on their perceptions of the effect of their attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning. Each teacher provided personal perceptions for this study. To ensure

confidentiality, each participant was assigned a number. The following is a brief description of each of the participants:

1. Participant #1 has an educational degree in and teaches middle-school math and science. A beginning teacher with less than 1 year of experience, Participant #1 was employed in the private sector prior to entering the educational field.
2. Participant #2 has been a teacher for 26 years, and holds an education specialist degree. She teaches seventh and eighth grades.
3. Participant #3 has 22 years of teaching experience. Her certification includes elementary education K–6 grade, middle-school reading, and language arts. Joy is a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade response to intervention (RTI) teacher.
4. Participant #4 has been a teacher for 17 years, and holds a masters' degree in the gifted educational program and an associate degree in child development. She teaches seventh grade and taught eighth grade in the past.
5. Participant #5 has been a teacher for 4 years and holds a bachelor's degree in middle grades, with a primary degree in mathematics and a secondary degree in science. She is a sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grade RTI teacher.
6. Participant #6 has been a teacher for 10 years and holds a master's degree in general education and a special education degree in K–8. She teaches sixth-, seventh-, and eighth-grades, with a concentration on RTI.

7. Participant #7 has been teaching for 11 years and has a master's degree in postsecondary education. He is pursuing a specialist degree in industrial technology. His experience includes teaching seventh and eighth grades English and Language Arts (ELA), which he continues to teach.
8. Participant #8 is a teacher with a certification in education and has been teaching for 6 years. His teaching experience has been in the middle school, and he teaches eighth-grade social studies.
9. Participant #9 has been a teacher for 28 years and holds a bachelor's degree in education. He is certified in middle grade education, reading and music. His experience includes teaching Grades 4 through 12, and in conducting chorus and band. He teaches Grades 6 through 8, and continues conducting chorus and band.
10. Participant #10 has been a teacher for 20 years and holds a bachelor's degree in education. His teaching career includes 17 years of teaching grades K through 12, and he now teaches seventh grade.

Interview Procedures

For this study, the same interview protocol was used for all interviews. Prior to signing the consent forms and participating in the face-to-face interviews, participants were briefed on the purpose and nature of the study, and the measures in place to maintain confidentiality for the participants and the school. Creswell (2003) emphasized that having a positive humanistic rapport with the participants may be profitable in retrieving quality in-depth data.

A one-hour time frame was allotted for each individual interview. To ensure privacy and eliminate interruptions, the interviews were conducted in a secluded room in the media center on the campus of the middle school. The following research questions were explored:

RQ1. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects middle-school students' behavior in the educational environment?

RQ2. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects students' learning?

The design of this qualitative case study followed Creswell's (2003) detailed data analysis process to ensure credibility of the data, interpretations, findings, and data clarity. Each interview was conducted independently and audio recorded in its entirety to ensure accuracy of the verbal responses to the interview questions. The data were organized according to the research questions and transcribed with a recurring process of listening to the audio recordings and reading of the interview responses to find linkage to the research questions. The data were examined for patterns, categorized, and labeled with the actual language of the participants. Themes (Table 1) were derived from the data during the analysis process. To validate the interview data, the transcripts were shared with the each participant at a meeting held in a secluded office on the middle-school campus during his or her planning period. The procedure to ensure the data's validity began with each participant reading their transcript, editing the data if necessary, and signing the transcript. During editing, the words *too* and *maybe* were inserted, and the

word *teachers* was changed to *students*. Member-checking authenticated the recorded data of the participants.

Table 1

Participants' Perceptions of Faculty Attire

<u>Research Question</u>	<u>Role Model</u>	<u>Students' Respect</u>	<u>Dedication</u>	<u>Setting Example</u>	<u>Look Professional</u>	<u>Team Player</u>	<u>Classroom Management</u>	<u>Influences Behavior</u>
Q1: What is your description of professional attire for teachers?	1	2	2	1	4			
Q2: What do you think your professional attire says about you as an educator?	1	1	2	2	2	1	1	
Q3: In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students' behavior in middle school?	2	2			2		3	1
Q4: In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students' learning in school?		1			3		1	

Note. The numbers represent the participants' general response to the questions.

The purpose of this qualitative study was to investigate teachers' perceptions of the effect of their attire on middle school students' behavior and learning. According to Hatch, "data analysis is a systematic search for meaning that allows the researcher to see patterns, identify things, and discover relationship interpretations" (2002, p. 148). It is a way to process qualitative data so that what has been learned can be communicated to others. Using the qualitative case study approach, each teacher expounded on each

interview question. To ensure that the same general area of information is collected from each interviewee, the same questions were presented to each interviewee (McNamara, 2009). The research questions in this study were designed to gain knowledge on teachers' perceptions of the effect of their attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning.

Themes and concepts emerged and were determined by the respondents' replies to each research question. The themes and the number of responses to each research question are displayed in Table 1. The analysis process began with reading the transcript multiple times to identify positive and negative responses. The responses were beneficial in gaining information on the effect teachers' attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning. Nine of the ten teachers were aware of the positive impact that nonverbal messages have on academic achievement.

A second common theme emphasized students' behavior in middle school. Teachers' nonverbal communication (attire) in the classroom impacts the behavior and learning of the students. This case study analysis revealed that teachers' professional attire has an impact on students' behavior and learning.

Face-to-Face Interviews

The qualitative, face-to-face interview case study was conducted to explore teachers' perceptions of the effect of their attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning. The data collection strategy provided me with direct data, as explained by Creswell (2003). I analyzed each participant's interview as a single qualitative case study. The interviews began with a personal introduction and a review of the procedures for the

interviews. I engaged the participants in a reflective interview to gather insight on their perceptions of the effect of teachers' attire on students' behavior and learning in a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. Each participant articulated his or her perception.

Interview Questions and Responses

The first interview question asked was, "What is your description of professional attire for teachers?" The following are the teachers' responses:

Participant #1: My opinion of professional attire for teachers is that they should dress according to the profession. In other words, I will always dress in slacks and a button-down shirt. On certain occasions, I will wear a tie because I believe that it is what teachers need to wear to represent the profession and how you value yourself.

Participant #2: You do not have to necessarily have a coat and tie or dress, but you need to look nice and presentable. That is how children look up to you as one who should be teaching. You do not want to look like you are going out to the garden, because I do not think they will give you the respect that you need in order to teach.

Participant #3: For teachers at this grade level, [one should wear] professional pants (not too casual), [and an] appropriate shirt, maybe with a cardigan. I wear this attire almost every day.

Participant #4: Basically, following the rules in what they have given us to wear. For me, I would say professional attire is dressing nicely and looking professional. In the middle school, we have jeans day that goes along with the mascot. Professional attire is dressing nicely, good hygiene, and not showing anything that should not be shown.

Participant #5: My description of professional attire for teachers is a dress, maybe a jacket, also khaki pants and a buttoned-down shirt. I think [you should wear] closed-toe shoes and [groom] your hair.

Participant #6: I think it has changed over the last ten years because my first six years, if I did not wear it to church or to the bank, I did not wear it to school. Here, at this school, teachers are very casual. I learned to wear business casual, slacks, and blouses. Children should have role models in how to dress and how to be in the business world. If students cannot wear it, the teachers should not wear it.

Participant #7: I think teachers need to be set apart from the students. They do not need to look like the kids, for the reason you need to know who the adult is in the room. I do not like to wear jeans and tennis shoes that much. There are times that we do, so I feel like I am not dressed professionally for the day. It does make a huge difference in how the students in the classroom see the teachers dressed professionally. A lot of the students think I dress for church all the time, but that is okay.

Participant #8: I am more of being comfortable and casual. Being comfortable and casual to teenagers might not come across as intimidation. Instead of coming dressed up all the time, especially if you come in a suit and tie, middle-school students are intimidated by us. They say, “Oh, he is in a suit and tie. I am scared of him. He is somebody important”; whereas, with a collared shirt and khaki pants, they feel more connected with me. I try not to dress up a lot because the children say, “Wow! He is dressed up today. What do you have going on?”

Participant #9: That is a difficult question. I think that depends on the area you are working in. It varies. For instance, I do not think a coach's attire would be the same as a classroom teacher. Running around in the gym in a coat and tie would not be appropriate. It is not the same for classroom teachers. If the teachers wear blue jeans, the children tend to treat the teacher as one of their peers. If the teachers dressed up more, the students seem to respect a little more. In the classroom, I think it makes a difference in how the students react in how a teacher dresses. If teachers dress up more, the students seem to respect more. I do not consider jeans as professional attire. There are days we have dress down days because of things they do. Dresses and nice suits for ladies and kakis for men are not good for the workforce.

Participant #10: I think they should look and be neat with tucked in shirts. The clothes should look like professionals; no tee shirt or baggy pants.

The second interview question asked was, "What do you think your professional attire says about you as an educator?" The following are the teachers' responses:

Participant #1: I think it says I take my job seriously. I am interested in setting good examples for my students, [being] a role model for them, and how you dress speaks [to] how you consider and value your job.

Participant #2: If you dress appropriately, you get the respect from your students. Also, on game days, dress down days or something like that, you let them know, 'I am doing this for you.' You want to kind of get down on their level.

Participant #3: One way respect is conveyed is in how we dress. If I want to be respected as a professional, I need to dress professionally.

Participant #4: My attire says I am a team player and I need to do what it takes in order for the students to learn. Such as 'hat day,' I play along with the kids and make the kids feel better.

Participant #5: If you think you look professional, the kids feel like you have it all together. How you look says a lot about how your students react to you. If your hair or clothes look disheveled, they might not take you seriously because you do not look like you have it altogether. They have to have consistency in the way you dress and the way you act 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.

Participant #6: I think it shows dedication and how serious you take it. 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: I respect my kids by looking professional in the classroom. As an educator you want to set yourself apart from the students, but you do not want to come to school with Gucci bags or something like that. You want to be down to earth, casual, and approachable. You want to look casual in your attire.

Participant #8: Being casual. I am someone the kids can talk to and not be intimidated. If I am in a shirt and tie, they are intimidated.

Participant #9: I do not participate in the dress down days, but that is a choice of mine. I wear khaki and polo shirts because I deal with instruments all day long. I also do after-school activities. A coat and tie would get in the way. I am on my feet all day long;

therefore, I wear athletic shoes. When the students come in, I am dressed as a professional and the students tend to treat me that way.

Participant #10: Personally, I think it means I am in charge. If I am in the gym coaching a basketball game, it says I am in charge. I should look like a coach, not one of the players. I should look different. I should always be neat. They should not have to ask, “Where is the coach?”

The third interview question asked was, “In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students’ behavior in the middle school?” The following are the teachers’ responses:

Participant #1: I do not necessarily know the home life of the students. I do not know the influence they get from parents and family members; however, when they come to school, they need to see a teacher as someone they can look up to and aspire to be like. I need to present myself in a way to inspire them. I should be a role model; someone they can emulate. Middle-school students naturally start to fit in. They are concern about their position in the social network, and a part of that is how they look and how they dress. I want to set myself up as someone they look up to and want to be like.

Participant #2: I think it sets the tone for the classroom. You do not have to have on a suit and tie or a dress in the classroom every day, but you do earn the respect by how you dress in the classroom. You should also act like a professional when you dress like a professional. I think you act more like a professional when you dress like a professional.

Participant #3: I think if you want the students to be serious, you have to show them you are serious because your dress says a lot about you. If you dress professionally,

they will look at you as a professional. You have to show them how serious you are about your position, and your dress expresses a lot about how you feel.

Participant #4: I like to dress up because I feel the kids respect you a lot more. I know that is good for you. A lot of that is in the attitude, and your respect for them and how they respect you back. The students look for you to wear what they wear.

Participant #5: Personally, I feel it does influence their behavior in the classroom because of the consistency. A lot of the behavior in the classroom comes from inconsistency. Being consistent in how you discipline and how you dress has a lot to with their behavior, especially in the middle school. I have noticed when I am not well and I may not have on makeup, I notice more behavior problems. Maybe they see how mom, dad or [the] grandparents dress and act. We do not know the home life; that may be a reflection. But how we dress and how we act is going to influence how they respond to us.

Participant #6: I think it is part of the authority figure. If you are not dressing like a friend and dressing more of an adult or parent, they can see this is someone I can come to. I could curtail if I come in with a tank top and flip flops, they are not going to take me very seriously, and probably will not behave as well. As long as you are appropriate, you are not showing too much leg and arm, it is part of classroom management. I think if you have a strong classroom presence you are not going to have any problems.

Participant #7: My kids know they cannot come into my room with pants sagging or anything like that because they know I am not going to put up with that. I do not have caps in the room, and I expect them to be presentable (boys and girls) at all times. I will

walk around the classroom and take hats off the heads. I will redirect. I do not write them up for that, I will redirect. I do not want students to look like they are not ready for learning. I want them to be comfortable. I do not want them to look like they are walking around on the street.

Participant #8: Students feel comfortable around me. I know other teachers, and we are a casual group. The kids come and talk to us about several things and they are not intimidated. Behavior-wise, I do not think that affects them much.

Participant #9: I think if the students see how you care about your dress, they are going to care about what you are teaching. If you do not care enough about how you look when you go to school, they are not going care about what you say. The whole class would be different. I think that is my philosophy. I think it is important to the kids that what we do is important enough that we dress for it.

Participant #10: Personally, in middle school, I do not think it has any bearing on what they think or how they act. It seems to be the same things the same way. I would hope it has some bearing that this is a professional setting.

The fourth interview question asked was, “In what way do you feel your attire influences students’ learning in the middle school?” The following are the teachers’ responses:

Participant #1: I dress in a way that I am implying I am serious about my job, educating them, and helping them grow in one school year. I think my dress has a lot to do with their learning on a daily basis. On a daily basis, they expect you to fulfill that role. Here, at the middle school, there are certain days they let us dress casually.

Occasionally I do. I know that the kids mention the change. That means a lot of the children are noticing it. I think it is influencing learning abilities because it gives the students the incentive to do better.

Participant #2: I think they respect you more; therefore, you expect more and they give you more. I feel students are paying more attention when you are dressed appropriately.

Participant #3: My students react to my expectations. Behavior and learning are connected. Dressing is part of learning. I show them in my actions. I am disappointed in some educators in how they dress. One black sweater and one pair of black pants can be worn many times in many ways. We are trained professionals. I feel dress is important.

Participant #4: A lot of my influence is in how I treat them, and how I respect them and show them my expectations. I do not feel my attire influences them unless I come to school dressed sloppy or something like that, and they want to talk about it instead of taking care of their learning. My kids are great kids, and how I dress is out respect for the kids and shows them how to dress professionally for a job. The kids want to see you dressed up on professional days such as Honors Day.

Participant #5: I feel there are two sides. Students should not have to focus on the way you dress, especially if it is flashy such as earrings flashing. There may be a student with Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), and they cannot focus anyway. If they cannot focus in the classroom, I feel that will affect their learning. I feel attire could distract students' learning. I feel attire is important in middle school. It depends on the teacher; some teachers may never dress well and have an awesome class. At the

beginning, I think attire affects our classroom learning, but once the class starts learning, then your actions will speak louder than your appearance.

Participant #6: I think the more professional you look, the more students perceive you know more like, “Oh, she is someone I can learn this knowledge from and esteem to do that when I grow up.” If you are a female wearing a tank top, or a male wearing a muscle shirt, that will be a distraction. You want to make sure that the clothing that you wear is not distractible in a negative way. You need to be presentable at all times. Every day is like an interview.

Participant #7: Students may look at how you are not dressed professionally in front of the room with sweatpants (man or woman). Students may look at how you do not do lesson plans. Students may look at you as if you do not care, or that you are lazy and complacent. But, when you stand in front of the class and you look professional, students feel that you care about yourself and you care about others. They need to see that you care.

Participant #8: They are more comfortable around me, and they are not intimidated around me. They listen and participate more which leads to higher learning. The students are more engaged.

Participant #9: Their behavior is important to me. If they see me dressed as a professional, then learning will be different. The attention and the attendance of the children will be different. They know that it is business when they come to class.

Participant #10: I do not think it has any bearing on their learning. I believe in the philosophy, “If you look good, you play good; you look neat, you teach better.” And that will allow the students to learn. The principal has made great progress in the school.

Interpretation of Findings

The intent of this case study was to determine teachers’ perceptions regarding the impact that their attire has on middle-school students’ behavior and learning. The interpretations of the findings are presented in connection to the conceptual framework and literature for this study. The research questions are major sources used for the framework for this interpretation, and the findings included data sources in this study.

I conducted 10 individual qualitative case studies that provided constructive information leading to the understanding of participating teachers’ perceptions of the effect that a teacher’s attire has on students’ behavior and learning. The results revealed that seven of the participants had similar perceptions regarding the positive influence of teachers’ attire on students’ behavior and learning. However, one participant held the perception that teachers’ attire does not totally influence students’ behavior and learning.

The findings are supported by the conceptual framework for this study, which is based on Bandura’s (1977, 2008) social cognitive theory that emphasizes the changes and lifelong development process in the psychosocial functioning of adults, as well as those occurring in childhood. The social cognitive theory emphasizes personal factors and environmental determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. The results confirmed that consistency in professional attire contributes to the influence of respect for teachers and is a positive strategy for classroom management.

The findings were supported by Bandura's (1977, 2008) social cognitive theory that learning from each other occurs via observation, imitation, and social values through appearance and attire, which expounded on individuals' behavior in terms of continuous reciprocal interaction between environment and environmental influence; meaning that one's environment causes one's behavior. According to Wong and Wong, teachers dress for the following main effects: (a) respect, (b) credibility, (c) acceptance, and (d) authority (2005, p. 55).

This study found that teachers perceived that their attire had an influence on students' learning. The social cognitive theory emphasized the continuous interaction between human behavior, cognition, and the environmental influence (Bandura, 1977, 2008). Wong and Wong (2005, 2009) acknowledged that teachers' attire contributed to the perception and the receptiveness of an individual. Attire influences students' respect for teachers and respect is necessary if optimal learning is to take place.

Students are imitators of the practices of teachers whom they admire, and students often learn from observation (Immaculate, 2010). Helderbran (2008) reiterated Goodlad, who emphasized that teachers command fundamental roles of deciding what, where, when, and how students learn. Teachers 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.

Data Analysis

Prior to analyzing the data, I transcribed each face-to-face interview. The process of transcribing the data allowed me the opportunity to become acquainted with the data (Creswell, 2003). The data are secured in a file cabinet in my home, and only I have access to it.

The data were analyzed to determine themes and discover important characteristics and qualities of teachers' attire. Themes emerged from the participants' responses during the reading of the interview data (Table 1). During the process, specific quotations were noted in the response to the research questions. I read each semistructured interview for specific phrases in the interview data in order to obtain a holistic picture. The review of the interview data revealed themes that were reflected in the actual language of the participants. Themes appeared as major findings, and displayed multiple perspectives from the participants who provided valuable information to help answer the research questions (Creswell, 2003).

Validity

Validity is seen as the strength to ensure accuracy in qualitative research data. Authenticity and credibility of qualitative data occurs from using several strategies (Creswell, 2003). I gathered the qualitative research data through individual face-to-face interviews, and then analyzed all data.

The first method to assure validity was the use of in-depth descriptions to convey findings (Creswell, 2003). The report of the data presented by the participants gave the

discussion an element of shared experiences. The presentation of the participants' personal profiles and the data in this study were presented with a rich description.

A second method of validity was member-checking to determine the accuracy of the data. Transcripts of the data were presented to each participant to ascertain whether their true feelings were reflected. All participants were invited to change anything they desired on the transcript, but none felt the need to do so. Member-checking contributed to validity because each participant verified his or her own words. Themes were developed from the direct responses of the participants.

Summary

Section 4 addressed the research design and presentation of the study. A qualitative case study design was employed for this study, and 10 certified teachers presented their personal perceptions of the effect of teachers' attire on students' behavior and learning at a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. The response to the research questions supports the fact that middle-school teachers' attire has an effect on middle-school students' behavior and learning. Section 5 is comprised of an interpretation of the findings, a discussion of social change implications, and a recommendation for further study.

Section 5: Discussions, Conclusions, and Recommendations

Overview

Section 5 summarizes the research problem and the methods used for this study. This qualitative case study sought to determine teachers' perceptions of the effect of their attire on middle-school students' behavior and learning in a rural middle school in southeast Georgia. Using a semistructured, individual, face-to-face interview method to gather data, 10 certified middle-school teachers were asked these research questions:

- RQ1. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects middle-school students' behavior in the educational environment?
- RQ2. How do teachers describe their perceptions of how their work attire affects students' learning?

Interpretation of Findings

This study's findings are summarized in this section. Prior to data collection, I sought approval from the Walden University IRB and was granted permission to conduct the study. I collected for this study through face-to-face interviews with 10 certified middle-school teachers. Interpretations of the findings were presented in relation to the conceptual framework and the literature for this study. The findings of this study indicated that the teachers' perception of their attire does have an impact on students' behavior and learning.

The first research question revealed that middle-school teachers' attire had a significant impact on middle-school students in a rural middle school in southeast Georgia where this study was conducted. The findings indicated that consistency in

professional attire contributed by influencing respect for teachers and was a positive strategy for classroom management. This was supported by the conceptual framework of Bandura (1977, 2008), who believed that individuals learn from each other via imitation and modeling—the continuous interaction between human behavior, cognition, and environmental influence were emphasized. Observing others is one form of how new behaviors are formulated and serve as a guide for action in related circumstances (Bandura, 1977, 2008).

The literature review supported the findings of this study. Borba (2006) emphasized that teachers' professional attire may influence students' level of respect toward teachers. For many teachers, clothing not only was a means of identifying oneself as a teacher, but also was a pedagogical strategy in itself, a means of commanding respect and order, and establishing a serious working atmosphere and control (Brownstein, 2010; Weber & Mitchell, 1995). Attire influences a student's respect for a teacher, which is necessary if optimal learning is to take place (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009).

The findings of RQ2 indicated that the perception of teachers' attire did have an effect on middle-school students' learning. The findings were supported by Bandura's (1977, 2008) conceptual framework and the literature for this study. Intentional and unintentional messages of academic learning were communicated in the social learning theory (Bandura, 2008). Teachers' attire affects students' work, attitude, and discipline. Respect, credibility, acceptance, and authority were four major effects of teachers' attire, and teachers who encompass these traits are more influential with young people than teachers who were deficient in these four traits (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009). Personal

attributes were altered by various modes of social influences such as modeling, various modes of social practices, and instructional practices.

Physical characteristics, socially conferred roles, and status were elicited reactions from the social environment without affirmation. The social reactions affected individuals by either strengthening or reducing the environment bias (Bandura, 2008). Vygotsky (1978) noted that school was a society in which learners cognitively develop through social interactions (Clabaugh, 2011). Helterbran (2008) reiterated Goodlad who emphasized that teachers command a fundamental role of deciding what, where, when, and how students learn. The professional attire of teachers was significant in terms of the cognitive and social development for students, the positive perception of teachers, and the position of teachers as role models in the school and society.

Professional attire sends messages of being professionally effective (Wong & Wong, 2005, 2009). The results of a study by Saiki (2006) revealed that teachers who were professionally attired were perceived by students as being believable, knowledgeable, and qualified. The participants in this study indicated that teachers' attire had an impact on students' behavior and learning. The findings of this study are supported by Bandura's (1977, 2008) conceptual work framework, and the literature review.

Implication for Social Change

The attire of teachers has been the subject of an ongoing debate. Professionally-attired teachers are important assets of middle schools. A significance of this study, and its implication for social change, was to generate data that acknowledged that

professionally-attired teachers are instrumental in making a positive difference in the academics and social growth of middle-school students.

When teachers are presented as professionally-attired educators, positive social changes may occur in middle schools and the educational environment in general.

Bandura (1989, 2008) believed that social reactions affect the recipients' perceptions of themselves and others in a way that either strengthens or alters the environment.

Bandura's (1989, 2008) social cognitive theory emphasized the changes and the lifelong development process in the psychosocial functioning of adults, as well as those occurring in childhood. The social cognitive theory emphasized personal factors and environmental determinants that influence each other bidirectionally. Reciprocal causation does not influence all factors simultaneously. Bandura (1977, 2008) further stated that causal factors exert their influence and activate reciprocal influence over a period of time. Before individuals speak or act, their social status and observable characteristics can affect the social environment. Social reactions can affect the recipients' perceptions of themselves and others in ways that either strengthen or alter the environment (Bandura, 1989, 2008). Social cognition relates to the foundation of the perception that an individual uses to make judgments about others and refers to how individuals form impressions of others and how they relate to themselves (Dixon, 2007).

Recommendations for Action

Maintaining a professional image in the middle school is of major importance to the behavior and learning of the students and the professional image of the teachers in the educational environment. The literature regarding the impact that a teacher's attire has on

the behavior and learning of middle-school students is limited. However, the findings in this study revealed that teachers' perceptions are that their attire has an impact on students' behavior and learning in the middle school, and these findings add to the body of knowledge on this topic. The following suggestions are offered to the key stakeholders for the implementation of a professional dress code guideline at the local setting:

1. The administrators and staff should engage in designing a professional attire plan for teachers. It is essential that the plan is aligned with the procedures of the school district.
2. The administrators and staff may engage in designing an ongoing evaluation plan and progression of professional attire in the middle school.
3. Periodically addressing the concerns and the progression of students' behavior and learning in the middle school is significant.
4. Teachers need to see themselves as role models and understand the effect that their attire has on their students so that they can be involved in implementing an acceptable dress code policy.

The implementation of a strategic plan for professional attire will have a positive effect on students' behavior and learning, and it will improve the professional image of the teachers in the middle school. The findings are worded in a way that conveys that teachers' attire influences student learning. However, the study focused on how teachers perceived that they influenced student learning.

Recommendations for Future Research

The case study design is appropriate for further research on this topic. This qualitative case study involved interviews with a small sample of teachers on their perceptions of the impact that teachers' attire has on students' behavior and learning in one middle school in southeast Georgia. It is possible that this study might be advanced by researching a larger, diverse population. Students' academic and social growth is extremely important in school, as well as beyond the walls of the school. Further research is needed to continue examining the impact and the influence teachers' attire has on students' behavior and learning. A future study could compare learning and behavior as indicated by scores with dress style.

Commentary

Conducting this study has been an extraordinary learning experience. Teachers' attire has been, and still is, a passion for me, and has been extremely significant to me during my entire teaching career. I believe that the professional attire of teachers positively influences the students' behavior and learning in middle school and the educational environment in general.

As I conversed with the teachers, a number of them were enthusiastic about participating in this study. They were excited about contributing to a study of their perceptions of the effect that their attire has on middle-school students' behavior and learning. The enthusiasm of the middle-school teachers is an assurance that professionally-attired teachers are fundamental in the schools.

As a retired educator, I concur with the statements from Workman and Freeburg (2010). Teachers fill important positions in society, and their attire contributes to the fulfillment of their role and professional identity. As representatives of the schools, teachers are integral in transmitting what is deemed by the mainstream population to be valuable cultural knowledge, moral values, and behavior norms. Students learn attitudes and behavior by observing teachers; therefore, teachers should be concerned about every facet of the modeling effect, including the attire worn in the learning environment (Workman & Freeburg, 2010).

Conclusion

Teachers must give attention not only to the content of the course, but also must consider the physical image that they convey which influences the students (Carr et al., 2009). The implications of this study suggest the need to be more aware of the attire worn in the classroom, and the effect that it has on students. In assessing the responses of the semistructured interviews from 10 certified middle-school teachers, the data revealed that teachers' attire has a significant impact on middle-school students' behavior and learning.

Summary of the Study

This study was conducted after receiving approval from the Walden University IRB (approval number 10-24-13-0120746). This qualitative case study provided constructive information that led to understanding the perceptions of the effect teachers' attire has on middle-school students' behavior and learning. Ten certified middle-school teachers were selected randomly to participate in this study, and each participant articulated personal perceptions of his or her attire on middle-school students' behavior

and learning. This study documented that teachers' attire has a major impact on students' behavior and learning.

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Appendix A: Interview Questions

1. What is your description of professional attire for teachers?
2. What do you think your professional attire says about you as an educator?
3. In what ways do you feel your professional attire influences students' behavior in the middle school?
4. In what ways do you feel your attire influences students' learning in the middle school?

Appendix B: Teacher Consent Form

Middle School Teachers Invitation to Participate in Research Study

You are invited to take part in a research study on *Teachers' Perception of Their Attire on Middle School Students' Behavior and Learning in the Middle School*. The researcher is inviting certified middle school teachers to be in the study. This form is part of a process called *informed consent* to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Elizabeth Sampson, who is a doctoral student at Walden University. You may already know the researcher as a former educator in the school system, but this study is separate from that role.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to probe teachers' perception of their attire on middle school students' behavior and learning.

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 data.

Sample Questions:

1. In what way do you feel your professional attire influences students' behavior in the middle school?
2. In what way do you feel your attire influences students learning?
3. What is your description of professional attire for teachers?

Voluntary Nature of the Study:

This study is voluntary. Everyone will respect your decision of whether or not you choose to be in the study. No one at Middle School will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time.

Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as stress. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

This study will provide significant data on how teachers describe their perception of how their work attire affects students' behavior and students learning in the educational environment.

Payment:

Individual participation in this study is voluntary. There will be no compensation for participating in this study.

Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by Elizabeth Sampson. Data will be kept for a period of at least 5 years, as required by the University.

Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via phone at Walden University's approval number for this study is _____ and it expires on _____.

The researcher will give you a copy of this form to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By signing below, I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.

Printed Name of Participant: _____

Date of Consent: _____

Participant's Signature: _____

Researcher's Signature: _____

Appendix C: Letter of Cooperation

Dear Elizabeth Clemons Sampson,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct the study entitled *Teachers' Perception of Their Attire on Middle School Students' Behavior and Students' Learning* with the teachers on the Middle School campus. As part of this study, I authorize you to implement recruitment, data collection, member checking, and results dissemination activities. Individuals' participation will be voluntary and at their own discretion.

The participants for this study will be randomly selected from the certified teachers' population of Middle School. One hour will be designated for each face-to-face interview session, and member checking will be implemented for each participant. The Board of Education disseminated materials to the principal and participants on the Middle School campus.

The purpose of this study is to determine the influence teachers' attire has on middle school students' behavior and learning. This study will contribute to the body of knowledge needed to address the problem and acknowledge that teachers' attire is an important part of the school culture and society.

We understand that our organization's responsibilities include allowing random selection of ten participants from the certified teachers' population, to providing a room in the Media Center for privacy and to prevent interruptions during the one-hour interview session, and allow participants to be interviewed during their planning period. We reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time if our circumstances change.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and may not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Signature: _____

Dated: _____

Appendix D: School Administrator Consent Form

October 10, 2013

Dear Mrs. Sampson,

Based on my review of your research proposal, I give permission for you to conduct your study at Middle School. I understand that your study will be examining teacher attire.

I understand that for the purposes of this study, certified teachers will be randomly selected from the population at Middle School and that face-to-face interviews will be conducted for data collection. One hour will be allotted for each interview. I also understand that member checking and data dissemination will be performed on the Middle School campus and that participation will be voluntary.

I understand that my organization will permit random selection of participants and provide a room for interview sessions. The organization and/or individual teachers reserve the right to withdraw from the study at any time.

I confirm that I am authorized to approve research in this setting.

I understand that the data collected will remain entirely confidential and will not be provided to anyone outside of the research team without permission from the Walden University IRB.

Sincerely,

Signature: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____