

1. Title: Teaching Effectiveness as Identified by Dress: A Multistate Study
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TEACHING EFFECTIVENESS AS IDENTIFIED BY DRESS: A MULTISTATE STUDY

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An individual's appearance affects the way others perceive him/her and non-verbally communicates information concerning his/her character, position, professional attributes, and social status. The importance of professional appearance in business careers has been well established in professional literature. However, the educational aspect seems to have little current research concerning the effect of teacher appearance on perceived teacher effectiveness particularly in light of business casual dress. Currently there is a strong emphasis on teacher accountability and effectiveness at all levels of education. Principals are being asked to validate teacher effectiveness and to provide in-service to enhance teacher's performance in the classroom.

Penny Storm (1987) defined dress as "a body covering, attachment, or treatment; it is essentially our appearance" (p. vii). An individual's appearance is essentially non-verbal communication and influences the perception and validity of the spoken word. Past research has found that dress is a critical factor in determining how effectively a teacher is perceived to be able to teach. Herbon and Workman (2001) states "that school dress and appearance codes are an expression of individual self but also a symbol of expected behavior" (p.69). In general, the manner in which a teacher presents himself/herself, via dress (or appearance), affects student perceptions of the teacher's ability to teach. In Workman's (1984-85) study, it was found that a teacher dressed in professional clothing produced higher scores on interpretive inferences about being intellectual and credible, and on extended inferences in regard to class preparation. However, all of the research was prior to the business casual or dress-down movement in the 1990's.

Purpose

The primary purpose of this research was to continue to expand the investigation of the perceptions of high school principals in regard to male and female dress of teachers in enhancing ten occupational attributes: responsibility, competency, knowledgeability, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthiness, willingness to work hard, and efficiency. This research surveyed high school principals across the states of Nebraska, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Utah, and Texas. A stratified random sample of 720 principal names was selected using the Table of Random Numbers. Educational Directories available from each state provided names.

Procedure

A two-part questionnaire, **A Survey of Principals: Teacher Dress**, was developed by researchers. Part I consisted of line drawings of dress modes: professional, business casual, and leisure, for both male and female. The principals were asked to rank the three sets of styles per gender according to ten different occupational attributes (Kwon, 1994)-responsibility, competency, knowledgeability, professionalism, honesty, reliability, intelligence, trustworthiness, willingness to work hard, and efficiency. Perceptions of ten occupational attributes were dependent variables and the dress styles and gender are

dependent variables and dress styles and gender are independent variables in the study. Statistical analysis was done using frequencies, percentages, and means.

Findings

Respondents were male (79.78%) Caucasian (94.50%). School boards and principals establish dress policy with principals (82.35%) being responsible for enforcement. Principals were somewhat (46.88%) satisfied with faculty dress on campus which was primarily business casual. In contrast, traditional attire was worn by principals (78.03%). Variables of income, comfort, school setting and lack of knowledge of appropriate dress were listed as factors in influencing teachers' dress. Comfort was identified as the primary factor in apparel selection by teachers.

The means for the top three attributes for females were **traditional dress:** professionalism (4.70), responsibility (3.97), and competence (4.28); for **business casual:** responsibility (3.97), professionalism (3.94), and competence (3.87); for **leisure dress:** honesty (2.52), intelligence (2.51) and knowledgeable (2.50). The mean for the top three attributes for males were: **traditional dress:** professionalism (4.67), responsibility (4.45), and competence (4.31); **business casual:** responsibility (4.03), professionalism (3.99), and competence (3.99); **leisure dress:** honesty (2.53), knowledgeable (2.51), and intelligence (2.51). If traditional business attire was worn, the teacher is perceived as being overwhelmingly professional, responsible, and competent. Compared to professional dress, there was a significant drop in mean scores for leisure attire. There were no common attributes in the top three means for both males and females across all three modes of dress. Traditional business attire indicates a more professional image for both males and females.

Implications

Teacher training curriculum should include information on how to dress professional for the classroom as well as for other school occasions. In this era of teacher accountability, the teacher's image is projected to not only the principal but to students, parents, school board members and the general public and affects how professional the teacher is viewed.

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