

## CHAPTER II

### Review of Literature

More than half of the officially reported crimes in schools are due to a relatively small percentage, six to seven percent of individuals (Gottfredson, Gottfredson, & Hybl, 1990, p. 2). School officials believe that many of the crimes and violent incidences are related to what students wear to school (Holloman, 1995). There is no argument that adolescents are stealing the clothes off others' backs, or in extreme instances, killing their peers (Darton, 1990). The perceived lack of discipline in schools continues to be a major concern by the public (Elam, Rose, & Gallop, 1996). This concern resulted in one of the national goals for education being the creation of safe, disciplined, and drug-free schools (OERI, 1993).

Parents and school officials fear that student safety is being threatened because of the predominant fashion trend of today's youth (Alvarez, 1995). Brodinsky (1977) noted that most back-to-basics advocates feel strongly about schools enforcing strict discipline to include dress codes regulating student apparel and hair styles. As school districts, parents, and administrators claim improvements in climate, attendance, discipline, achievement, and self-esteem due to mandatory and voluntary school uniform policies, (USDJE, 1996) empirical evidence regarding its effectiveness is scarce. This chapter explores the relationship between dress and the social, affective, and cognitive components of school climate indicators "such as student conduct

reports, attendance, and student grade averages” (Gonder, 1994, p. 77).

### School Climate

Gonder (1994) describes school climate as having four attributes: physical, social, cognitive and affective (p. 80). This study focused on the social, cognitive, and affective dimensions of school’s climate. The physical plant or school building was one year old, and thus deemed not relevant. These dimensions have been operationalized as discipline and attendance, grade point average, and self-esteem.

### Discipline and Attendance

A great deal has been written on the importance of school climate in terms of school discipline and management, particularly through research on effective schools. A positive school climate is an essential component of an effective school (Levine & Lezotte, 1990, p. 10). Schools that perform well have environments where disorder is not prevalent. “One of the more negative effects of disruptive behavior is its ability to shift the focus of the school from academic pursuit to that of order. The end product of this change is lowered academic expectations and a custodial climate” (Johnson, 1989, pp. 2-3). “Symptoms of a negative climate include high daily absentism and discipline referral rates, vandalism, and reported thefts” (Stenson, 1985, p. 54).

Schools with high levels of poverty, most often located in urban centers, are especially challenged to design discipline programs that foster student self-discipline,

in order to create a school climate conducive to learning (Short, Short & Blanton, 1994). If classroom control is a prerequisite to classroom learning, efforts to improve discipline are a critical first step to laying the foundation for improved school climate. Studies have shown that student outcomes such as administrative referrals, suspensions, discipline, attendance, and perceptions of being safe and secure, can be improved by creating a climate more conducive to learning (Paredes, 1993; Carpenter, 1992; Levin & Lezotte, 1990; FinLayson, 1987; Grace, 1986; Anderson, 1982; Allen, 1981; Fleming, 1981).

Nusser and Haller (1995) found compelling relationships between discipline and drop-out rates. As students perceive discipline to be unfair or ineffective, the number of drop-outs increases. “Ninety-five percent of children who failed once drop out of school, and 99% of students who flunked twice drop out. Therefore, grading and retention can have a negative impact on school climate” (Gonder, 1994, p. 9).

### Academic Performance

Variables such as socio-economic status, safety, and student behavior are important to achievement. For example, findings show that as the percentage of low-income students increase, scores indicating a positive school climate decrease (Paredes, 1991). According to Bandura (1986), “people are neither driven by inner forces nor automatically shaped and controlled by external stimuli. Rather, human functioning is explained in terms of a model of triadic reciprocity in which behavior,

cognitive, and other personal factors and environmental events, all operate as interacting determinants of each other” (p.18). Self-efficacy or “student judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances”(p. 391) can affect school climate and academic outcomes. Fleming (1981) found that there is a relationship between student perception of organizational climate of the school and student attitudes toward school, student behavior, and student achievement. Studies linking behavioral problems and academic difficulty in school reiterate the importance of a positive school climate on mitigating the problems of “at-risk” youth (Brantlinger, 1993; Carpenter, 1992; Owings, 1992; Bedford, 1987). Gottfredson, et. al, 1990, found that at-risk youth tend to display the following characteristics:

- less academic competence
- a dislike for school
- more delinquent friends
- a lower belief in conventional rules than do their more conforming peers
- poor interpersonal skills and rejection by peers
- disorderliness in unstructured classrooms. (pp. 3-4)

What cannot be overemphasized is that schools have a distinct climate which mediates a student’s interpersonal and educational development (Ziagrelli, 1996). In

addition to self-efficacy, it is important to determine students' feeling and attitudes towards a "sense of community and belonging; sense of warmth, concern, and civility; and a sense of feeling safety and security" (Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, p. 396) as additional measures of school climate. If the environment and its interaction with personal characteristics of the individual are critical determinants of human behavior, how can clothing be used to manipulate behavior?

### Clothing, Behavior, and Self-esteem

If you support the notion that you are what you wear, then it is possible to change individual behavior. "The social-psychology of clothing is concerned with the various means people use to modify the appearance of the body, as well as social and psychological forces that lead to, and result from, processes of managing personal appearance" (Kaiser, 1996, p. 4).

Appearance management deals with all of the thinking processes and behaviors we engage in that control the way we decide to look. Appearance perceptions deal with how one evaluates, makes inferences, and judgments based on the way one looks (Kaiser, 1996, p. 4). If a student believes by virtue of their appearance that they are smart, it is not unreasonable to expect them to behave as such.

The relationship between attitude and behavior is interactive. Not being able to purchase needed or wanted clothing or feeling deprived when compared to one's peers, may affect an individuals' behavior, group acceptance, and participation in

social activities (Francis, 1992). Like school climate, self-esteem can be measured along social, affective, and cognitive dimensions. “A general hypothesis is that students with positive self-esteem will do better in school. To the extent that you can increase a student’s self-esteem, that student will work harder, interact appropriately with others, deal with success and failure in school, accept criticism well, have positive interactions with other students, and be willing to share and work confidently” (Haladyna, 1997, p. 206).

### Self-image and Self-esteem

Fashionability and resources used to make clothing decisions by children in the 1990's are also influenced by the media (Forney & Forney, 1995; Jacobson & Mazur, 1995) via television, magazine or video. According to Johnson (1982), the socio-cultural importance of dress lies in “legitimization and reinforcement of the habitual manner in which people identify, respond to, group, and evaluate themselves one to another” (p. 4). Adolescents learn consumer behavior, through socialization and incidental learning. The inability to afford expensive designer clothing, or clothing deprivation, can cause students to feel poorly about themselves and subsequently have a low self-esteem and self-image (Shook, 1996).

### Clothing Deprivation and Self-image

During transcendence, middle school students rely heavily upon their peers to

make sartorial choices (Forney & Forney, 1995; McNeal, 1987). As students get older, parents become less influential and important even though they are providing the money for purchases. “Research has suggested that not only does clothing have a definite influence on the characteristics one attributes to others, but also reflects and affects one’s own self-esteem” (Shook, 1996, p. 76).

A study of junior high school students in a large urban school district in Texas found that students in search of a self-image and identity can become so preoccupied with their appearance that they may adopt clothing styles similar to gangs even though they may not actually belong to one (Forney & Forney, 1995). The desire to avoid social isolation is so strong during adolescence that students will make clothing choices to fulfill “the need to understand, affiliate, and achieve” (McNeal, 1987, pp. 17-18). Students will, therefore, frame their experiences in a situation by assessing how they and others “fit” into a social situation.

### Clothing Deprivation and School Climate

There is a growing consensus among researchers that self-esteem is comprised of factors including academic competence, social competence and participation, appearance, and adult, especially parental approval (Flanburg, 1991). While there are no available studies investigating the relationship between uniforms, self-esteem, and school climate specifically, there are studies suggesting that there is a relationship between clothing in general, school climate, self-image, social participation, social

competence, and academic self-efficacy as components of self-esteem (Hughes, 1996; Shook, 1996; Stanley, 1996; Behling, 1995; Callen, 1992; Francis, 1992).

Callen (1992) investigated the relationship between students' perceptions regarding school climate relative to clothing deprivation, and not having the appropriate attire when compared to others, and self-esteem. Findings revealed that as feelings of clothing deprivation increase, females scored lower in three self-esteem domains: social acceptance by peers, physical appearance or looking good, and global self-worth, generally feeling happy with oneself. Other findings showed that females with high feelings of clothing deprivation also had low perceptions of school climate.

#### Clothing Deprivation, Social Participation, and School Climate

Shook (1996), in her study of perceived clothing deprivation and its relationship to social participation and self-esteem, surveyed 6<sup>th</sup> grade students in an urban Florida middle school, and found that self-esteem decreases when students do not have appropriate or fashionable clothing. Not having the right attire has an impact on social participation and competence. As feelings of social competence and participation increase, feelings relative to clothing deprivation decrease. Students who are engaged in positive communications between and among persons in the school become less concerned about not having, owning, or affording the latest fashions. Shook (1996) believes the results of her study support the need to consider uniform dress in public schools (pp. 74-75).

Behling (1995, 1994, & 1991) examined the relationships among varying dress styles, including uniforms, sex of the model, and perceptions regarding school-related behavior, academic potential, and scholastic ability in public, private, and parochial schools. Behling used schools with diverse demographic composition (ethnicity, size, type and socioeconomic level), status of the perceiver, and gender as independent variables, findings indicated that clothing can produce a “halo effect.” Thus, a student in uniform is seen as better behaved, a high academic achiever, and someone with high academic potential, particularly when wearing a “dress uniform,” (i.e., pants or skirt, shirt, blouse, tie, and blazer). Several studies have investigated the relationships between clothing type and perceptions. Research has shown that attire may influence the teaching to learning process through perceptions related to effectiveness by teachers and students.

### Uniforms in Schools

Historically, schools have prescribed dress code standards for students based upon what they believed was acceptable since 1923, in Pugsley v. Sellmeyer, case in which “the court held that it is a proper function of the school to require students to wear uniforms to school, and to prohibit the wearing of cosmetics, certain types of hosiery, low-necked dresses, or any style of clothing which may tend according to community norms, to be immodest” (Alexander & Alexander, 1995, pp. 104-105). Ironically, more than seventy years later because of an increase in violence in schools,

administrators are revisiting the option to adopt dress codes to improve student behavior and school climate (Alvarez, 1995; Majestic, 1991).

### Private and Parochial Schools

Heretofore, uniforms have predominantly been associated with private or parochial schools and industrialized nations like Japan. According to a press release by the National Catholic Educational Association (NCEA), 84% of Catholic elementary school students wear uniforms and those remaining have a dress code.

Reasons supporting the use of uniforms in Catholic schools as stated in a public news release include:

- The uniform is a symbol of our Catholic identity. It is an outward expression of our brotherhood and sisterhood in Christ.
- The Catholic school is a meeting place for people from various socioeconomic backgrounds. By wearing a uniform, children are on a level playing field in terms of their attire.
- Uniforms prevent interpersonal competition in the area of dress, allowing students to focus on academic success.
- The uniform represents the “business suit” for students. School is a serious business and calls for different clothing than do social events or play.
- The uniform requires students to accept responsibility. They must come to school each day dressed in the appropriate manner. (NCEA, 1996, p. 1)

### Public Schools

Reasons cited by public schools for the adoption of uniform policies are similar to

those purported by parochial schools, and can be found in the United States Department of Justice's (USDJ), 1996 "Manual on School Uniforms." Additional reasons given by the NCEA in support of uniforms include "a decrease in violence and theft—even life threatening situations among students over designer clothing or expensive sneakers, help to prevent gang members from wearing gang clothing and insignia at school, and help school officials to recognize intruders who came to the school" (USDJ, 1996, p. 1). According to Kaiser (1997), uniforms:

- foster a belief that discipline and respect for teachers increases;
- promote group spirit;
- foster academic standards maintained through uniformity; promote relief thus easing parental budgets;
- lead to a decrease in the race for social status, accompanied by an ability to de-emphasize socioeconomic differences by limiting "fashion statements"; and
- allow for easy identification of intruders on the school campus. (pp. 378-381)

Stanley (1996) adds that "uniforms can support the connection between school, learning, and future success by teaching that appearance is an important part of the nonverbal communication individuals use to establish their credibility in roles. This suggests that students who come to school "dressed for success" and ready to learn have a higher probability of achieving the goals" (pp. 426-427). What benefits have other industrialized nations found when students wear uniforms?

## Uniforms in Other Industrial Nations

### Great Britain

The recent trend toward uniform adoption as a mechanism to increase school safety is not unique to the United States. A number of public schools in Great Britain are reestablishing dress code policies as a means to create a disciplined learning environment. There is a concern that children are “becoming scruffier and scruffier.” “It appears that with the government’s open-enrollment policy, parents seem to be opting for schools with strict dress codes because they believe schools with uniforms have better discipline” (Griffiths, 1994, pp. 4-5). Uniforms are viewed as an intervention strategy for truancy and trespassing in Great Britain and Japan (Rafferty, 1993; Tanioka & Glaser, 1991).

### Japan

The Japanese also use uniforms as a major component of classroom management through social control theory (Tanioka & Glaser, 1991). The Japanese use school uniforms in conjunction with routine activities to control delinquency. “It is believed that non-delinquents can be taught to curb urges to commit offenses through the acquisition of a stake in conformity from their bonds with conventional society. The sources of these bonds are attachment to conventional persons, involvement in conventional activities, commitment to conventional pursuits, and anti-criminal beliefs” (p. 50). These are the guiding principles for Social Control Theory.

In their study of Social Control Theory and delinquency, Tanioka and Glaser (1991) examined uniform styles as an independent variable, with levels described based upon the degree of recognizable visibility. A continuum of styles of dress ranged from very formal to very informal. Each participating school was given a “visibility-of-uniform” rating, which was then correlated with crime and status offenses to produce an indicator of informal control through identifiability because of school’s uniform style. It is quite clear from the study’s findings that delinquency varies inversely with identifiability or visibility of the school uniform, with a rank correlation of  $-.924$ , significant at the  $p < .001$  level (p. 53). In other words, as the formalness of the uniform styles increases, crime and status offenses decrease. It appears according to Social Control Theory, that an individual will be less likely to do something wrong wearing clothing that is easily recognizable.

### Uniform Studies

Administrators, teachers, and parents purport the ability of uniforms to improve a student’s self-esteem, self-concept, self-image, school climate, attendance, achievement, and behavior (Soltner, 1997; Hughes, 1996; Stanley, 1996; Scher, 1995; Chunn & Stevenson, 1991). Perceptions of improvements, however, are not consistently supported by the data.

### Achievement and Attendance

Upon examination, data revealed that there were no apparent statistically

significant differences noted in the academic performance or average daily attendance of students. In some cases, attendance actually dropped (Stanley, 1996; Scher, 1995; and Chunn & Stevenson, 1991). However, it appears that uniforms did seem to have an impact on student discipline (Stanley, 1996; Hughes, 1996; Scher, 1995).

### Discipline

When surveyed, adult respondents indicated positive perceptions about school climate and student outcomes. However, students responded that they did not feel safer going to and from school, nor did most students credit uniforms as reducing behaviors such as fighting, nor fostering feelings of belonging (Hughes, 1996; Stanley, 1996; Scher, 1995; Chunn & Stevenson, 1991;).

Early findings from a longitudinal study, according to Stanley (1996), indicate that Long Beach schools are “remarkably safer, although it is not clear that these results are entirely attributable to the uniform policy” (p. 431). Reductions in suspensions, fights, discipline referrals, corporal punishment, and classroom disruptions can be linked to uniforms and school safety (Hughes, 1996; Stanley, 1996; and Scher, 1995).

Schools studied which have mandatory uniform dress code policies (Hoffler-Riddick & Lassiter, 1996; Hughes, 1996) appear to have greater reductions in discipline infractions when compared to schools with voluntary policies (Stanley, 1996; Scher, 1995). It is also interesting to note, that in the Hughes study where two types of dress were compared (formal uniform and informal dress mode), achievement,

attendance, and discipline results were more positive in the school with the less formal dress mode, when compared to its uniformed counterpart.

### Summary of Clothing and Uniform Studies

A summary of studies involving uniformed type clothing support the notion that attire can influence behavior (Appendix B). Whether the wearing of uniforms is an influential variable strong enough to improve student discipline, self-esteem, attendance, and academic is unanswered. If a school or district decides, however, to pursue the adoption of a dress code policy, on the absence of valid empirical data, there are legal considerations and guidelines, that should be considered.

### Legal Considerations When Implementing a Uniform Policy

School authorities may adopt strict dress codes policies if they can show a connection between the appearance and negative behavior or distraction (Kuhn, 1996; Lane & Richardson, 1992). Setting appropriate dress standards for students is a legitimate school purpose. When the motive is to help students to respect themselves or to create a better environment through enhanced discipline, a student's right of sartorial expression can be constitutionally limited when it interferes with another student's right to learn in a safe and orderly environment (Majestic, 1991). Students will find it difficult to win in court unless they can demonstrate how their fashion statements are an expression of something deeper (Podgers, 1995).

### Opposition to Mandatory Policies

Opposition from the American Civil Liberties Union centers around the belief that uniforms take away the individual's freedom of expression. They insist that mandatory uniform policies create a school environment that represses individuality and induces conformity. Additional arguments against uniforms offered by Caruso (1996), include:

- school uniforms are an infringement of First Amendment rights.
- school uniforms are tools of administrative power.
- school uniforms are an economic hardship.
- school uniforms will NOT deter violence or gang activity.
- social classes among students will remain.
- the evidence to support school uniforms is not statistically valid or reliable. (pp. 86-88)

### Legal Challenges

Mandatory uniforms met legal challenges in the Long Beach and Phoenix Elementary School Districts. According to the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU, 1988), "students have the right to determine their own dress except where such dress is clearly dangerous, or so inappropriate as to interfere with the learning and teaching" (ACLU, 1988, p. 38). In the California case, low income families represented by the Legal Aid Foundation and the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California, and who claimed to support the policy fully, found that the

uniform policy discriminated against poor children who could not afford the uniforms. The case was settled out of court, and the district further agreed to do more to help poor students get uniforms and let families know they can ask for exemptions to the policy ("Schools Try Uniforms," 1996).

In Phoenix Elementary School District No. 1 v. Green, Judge Jones as reported in Education Week (1995) ruled that the:

school district acted reasonably by adopting the mandatory uniform policy for the middle school. The district had legitimate goals of eliminating gang related clothing and placing students of varying socioeconomic levels on an even footing with regard to their appearances to promote a more effective climate for learning. It is not for the court to second guess the decision of the school board as to whether a parental opt-out policy is more reasonable than the mandatory uniform policy. (p. 9)

### Legislation

Several states have passed legislation enabling districts to implement uniform policies. California was the first state to pass legislation enabling school districts to impose voluntary uniform requirements for elementary and middle school students (Loesch, 1995). House Bills 1206 and 1054 granted authority for school districts in Virginia to develop uniform policies and issued model guidelines for planning, implementing, and evaluating a school uniform program (Virginia State Department of Education, 1992 & 1995). Additional states which have enacted school uniform legislation are Florida, Georgia, Indiana, Louisiana, Maryland, New York, Tennessee, and Utah (USDJ, 1996).

### Guidelines for Implementation

In the Manual on School Uniforms, (1996) produced by the United States Department of Justice (USDJ), several model uniform programs were featured, including the middle school selected for this study. An analysis of these programs resulted in eight guidelines recommended for school use when developing a uniform policy:

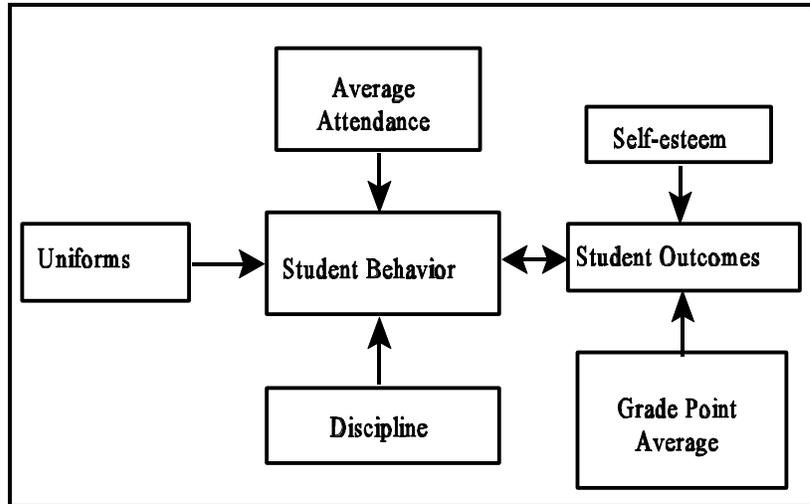
- get parents involved from the beginning;
- protect students' religious expression;
- protect students' other rights of expression;
- determine whether to implement a voluntary or mandatory policy;
- consider an opt-out provision for a mandatory policy;
- do not require students to wear a written message;
- assist families that need financial help; and
- treat school uniforms as part of an overall safety program. (p. 4)

All of these guidelines were considered when the policy was established at the school under study. The belief that uniforms would have a positive impact on student behavior and attitudes was one of the main reasons for its inception. The relationship between behavior, attitude, and student outcomes is presented in the conceptual model displayed in Figure 1.

### Summary

This study examined the impact of a mandatory uniform dress code policy on student outcomes: attendance, discipline, grade point average, and self-esteem. Using the recommendations posited by Paliokas and Rist (1996) to measure policy effects, a historical series of observations was used to determine if the change was real change, using data gathered from experimental and control groups (p. 37).

Figure 1.  
A change  
in  
student  
dress to  
uniforms



may positively affect student behaviors of attendance and discipline which are considered by Gonder (1994) to be appropriate measures to assessing school climate. Student behavior then influences students outcomes of self-esteem as an affective measure of school climate and grade point average as a cognitive measure of school climate. The relationship between student behavior and student outcomes is cyclic.