

# Teaching Style

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**An Investigation of New York City Public High School  
Teacher Dress Practices**

By

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This manuscript has been read and accepted for the Graduate Faculty in Urban Education in satisfaction of the dissertation requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy.

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## **Abstract**

### **Teaching Style: An Investigation of New York City Public High School Teacher Dress Practices**

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In recent decades there has been increasing interest in regulating teacher appearance in the schools. While there is a great deal of anecdotal data available about what dress standards for teachers should be, to the best of the researcher's knowledge no one has undertaken scholarly research to investigate teacher attitudes towards their constructions of self, self-as-teacher, and educational philosophies as expressed by dress practices.

Predicated upon the theory that the study of self presentation provides a window through which we can gain insight into these constructions, this dissertation investigates how a sample of nine New York City public high school teachers use dress to define 'personal self' and 'self-as-teacher' identities as well as their educational beliefs. It is hoped that the findings of this research will contribute to better understanding of a topic that thus far has largely been neglected by educational scholars even while it has nationally attracted both interest and debate within and beyond the realm of public schools.

## **Dedication**

This dissertation is dedicated to my mother, Rhoda W. Brownstein, homemaker, teacher, scholar, realtor extraordinaire, property developer, New Haven personality and purveyor of eyebrow-raising and sage advice to this day. In 1971 she became a doctoral candidate in Psycholinguistics at New York University, a degree she abandoned after my father's death. Instead, she went back to work as a businesswoman and provided her children with extraordinary educations and lives. A loving mother and confidante, Rhoda continues to teach by example just how much effort is involved in becoming and staying successful in all aspects of one's life, and the joy of living each day with imagination, laughter, curiosity and grace.

## Acknowledgements

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The last and loudest shout-out of all goes to the wonderful teachers who generously participated in this study, and of course, all of my students who continue to provide critical feedback about my dress and coiffure. Without their insight, humor and candor, this study would not have been dreamed of or realized.

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## Chapter 1

### INTRODUCTION: THE TEACHER LOOK?

In dressing, we address ourselves, others and the world. How we clothe ourselves becomes an integral part of our self-identity. How, then, do teachers dress? What are the social contexts within which they operate? How are stereotypes, memories of schooling, actual experiences, dreams, intentions, complacencies and frustrations played out through their choice of clothes? (Weber and Mitchell 1995)

As Weber and Mitchell suggest, inquiry into teacher dress offers a portal for gaining insight into how teachers interpret and construct the teacher role. Judging from both popular and professional education print media over the past three decades, there has been a significant increase in criticism of teachers for their lack of ‘professional’ dress. During the same time period, however, there has been relatively little scholarly investigation of why teachers dress as they do. To help reconcile the apparent disparity between criticism of and inquiry into teacher dress, this study is directed towards gaining better understanding of teacher dress practices as they may express how teachers perceive their professional teacher role.

In the New York City Department of Education some teachers and all administrators know that “personal appearance” is the second evaluation criterion listed on the Annual Professional Performance Review form that principals are required to complete annually to assess teacher professional performance (see Appendix I). While historically no teachers have ever been dismissed from their positions on the basis of unsatisfactory appearance alone, the fact that “personal appearance” continues to be listed as a professional evaluation criterion in the NYCDOE suggests that appearance

has to be taken into some kind of consideration in assessing how teachers perform professionally. At the same time, however, there are no specific written guidelines for how teachers should and should not dress for work in New York City. In view of this, the focus of this study is to pose the 'question' of what constitutes professional teacher dress to the teachers themselves to better understand how dress may be used to express their perception of the professional teacher role.

The topic of this dissertation was conceived from the researcher's past and current experiences as a teacher and administrator working in the New York City public schools. In particular, this topic evolved from the researcher's many conversations with teachers about the 'appropriateness' and 'professionalism' of their dress choices. The objective of this study, however, is not intended to expose teacher dress practices in New York City public high schools in order to praise or vilify the current teacher work corps. Rather, the intention is to investigate teacher dress as a generally unscripted material "text" of the school environment that is selected and crafted by teachers as an enactment of their interpretation of the teacher role. Stated otherwise, the aim of this dissertation is to explore how teachers use dress as an expression of how they perceive their role as professional teachers. Ultimately, it is hoped that investigation into this topic will illuminate how urban high school teachers perceive their role as professional teachers and that this insight will benefit teachers, policy-makers and those outside the classroom concerned with education.

A mostly anecdotal history of teacher dress regulations and practices in New York City is provided below to establish a context for the study. In the following

chapters, this background will be set into the deeper context of the history of regulating dress in the schools in the United States and will provide a backdrop for the present study of current teacher dress practices in New York City public high schools.

### **Historical Background of Teacher Dress in New York City**

If ever there were a highly challenging area of inquiry to research in the New York City Department of Education, it is the history of teacher dress in the New York City public schools. Despite the myriad of opinions that almost everyone in NYCDOE administration is willing to proffer “unofficially,” it is all but impossible to get anything in writing or stated “officially.”

One of the initial difficulties encountered by the researcher was identifying the correct office to contact for historical information. It simply is not as obvious as one might think. The search for historical information began with the Office of Human Resources. Multiple attempts to discuss the matter of teacher dress policy were fruitless, and those willing to share information were administrative support personnel not in a position to make hiring decisions and/or unfamiliar with the history of teacher dress. Ultimately, research efforts were extended to the Office of Communications and Media Relations, the division of the NYCDOE that handles information inquiries from the public. This also proved to be a disappointing lead. During the twenty-two month period of the study, this office was contacted by telephone, mail and e-mail for a total of ten attempts, none of which elicited a response. Two attempts to visit the office were also met with disappointment. Ultimately, research efforts into these offices were

abandoned, leaving the researcher wondering how to interpret the meaning of the apparent impossibility of contacting a “higher official” about the matter of teacher dress. After this lengthy search it was hard to know whether the failure to find information was a matter of improving the research approach, of nobody caring, of there being no policy, of there being no “there” there, or more intriguing still, there being a covert policy.

The apparent difficulty of having any kind of discussion about the matter of teacher dress with current NYCDOE “officials” led the researcher to conclude that how teachers *should* dress is something that is either not worthy of discussion by Central and/or and is one of the few things left to the schools to regulate. This was not always the case. According to Katie Giorgio<sup>1</sup>, a veteran teacher, administrator and special education supervisor for District 10 who retired in June, 2009, there was a time when Central “severely limited” what women could and could not wear. In an interview she recounted the following:

There was a time when male teachers were expected to report for work in a jacket and tie, and female teachers were expected to report wearing a knee-length skirt, panty hose and an appropriate top such as a sweater, blouse and/jacket. Imagine, pantyhose and heels in the snow! When I first started out in Brooklyn in 1972, my [male] principal told the women that we would be sent home to change and get a letter in our file if we did not

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<sup>1</sup> Ms. Giorgio’s actual identity, similar to that of all the study’s interviewees, is protected by a pseudonym.

observe the dress code. I don't think any of us thought to question it. I mean, we knew we were teachers and role models for the students. In those days there weren't any hippies becoming teachers, at least nobody I knew in Brooklyn. But heels in the snow?! How backwards is that?  
(Giorgio 2008)

Ms. Giorgio's recounting of her early days as a teacher brought to life the extent to which teacher dress had been regulated – and a times unjustly – until 1974. Eduardo Martin, a former teacher who for the past twelve years has worked in public relations for the UFT, verified anecdotal data collected from Keri Mitchell, retired teacher and administrator, that 1974 was the formal end of the regulation of teacher dress in New York City. The UFT, under the leadership of UFT president Albert Shanker, was able to negotiate a new contract for teachers that, among many other things, ended what had been perceived by many teachers as an oppressive list of restrictions upon dress. However, according to Ms. Mitchell,

It's not like one day we went from skirts to pants. Oh no. There was this special pantsuit, a polyester thing that was a jacket and pants "suit" that we were allowed to wear. You had to buy it from a certain stores that carried it – there was some kind of "authorized" version of the pantsuit. I never got one because frankly I look bad in pants and seldom wear them unless it's really cold out. I'm not sure where you had to buy it. Anyway, after a while of women wearing these dreadful polyester things they kind of faded away, like so many Board of Ed initiatives. For me,

the change in dress code meant I didn't have to wear stupid heels when the weather was bad out. (Mitchell 2008)

Given that the New York City public school system is one of the largest in the world, it should not be surprising that there were some teachers who chose to "violate" the strict dress codes, especially those for women. According to Shaggy Levine, a recently retired 37-year veteran of the NYCDOE, there were more than a few teachers who openly defied the dress codes:

In 1968 I went from wearing pigtails and a skirt in the nice school where I had been teaching in Flushing to a boy's haircut and pants and blouses in a school in a "bad" part of the Bronx. It was a sensible decision because of the kinds of kids I was teaching. There were a couple of male teachers who didn't wear jackets and ties, either, but they didn't have long hair like you'd expect back then. I know my principal didn't really like how we were dressing but we were always respectful and did our jobs. The sixties were a wild time and it must have been hard to get any kind of semi-sane teachers up there. That's probably why our "hipster" styles were tolerated. I don't know how dressing in a more relaxed way even got started at that school. At least we showed up and didn't do anything too obviously crazy. Plus, I think the principal knew that those dress codes were ridiculous and nobody from Central was ever going to really care about our zany school in the Bronx. Why bother to enforce them? (Levine 2009)

That the UFT was able to overturn what appears to have been the longtime practice in regulating teacher dress should be unsurprising in light of the societal changes of the 1960s and changes in the regulation of student dress (for a full discussion see Brunnsma 2004). What is interesting is that the memory of the teacher dress regulation appears to be swiftly fading away. Only teachers and other school personnel who have worked with colleagues old enough to remember the “oppressive old days” of teacher dress have an idea of what the regulation of teacher dress used to be. As Laura Pena-Robles, a school support staff worker in the NYCDOE since the late 1960s observed, “It wasn’t just the teachers who had to dress a certain way, either. All of us had to wear a dress code all the time, especially for picture days. People forget just how widespread those dress codes were back then, and how we actually followed them.” (Pena-Robles 2010) As will be discussed later, what is now in the place of dress regulations appears to be the conception that principals have the right to dictate teacher dress and non-compliant teachers must face serious consequences. According to Eduardo Martin of the UFT, this simply is not the case: A teacher cannot be given a “U” rating (unsatisfactory rating) for violating the school dress code. However, as Mike Politowski, former Superintendent of Alternative Schools has observed, “you may not be able to dismiss a teacher for showing up for work every day in a wetsuit or evening gown, but you can give him/her a “U” rating and potentially fire him/her for not having an educational reason for doing so.” (Politowski 2006) If nothing else, this last remark in particular suggests that there is some kind of notion that teacher dress does serve as part of the educational purpose of the schools.

## The Teacher Look?: Statement of the Problem

Teacher dress has the potential for stimulating a broad range of discussion about how teachers should look, behave and 'be' that is contested and negotiated. There is increasing public dissatisfaction about teachers which often manifests itself in criticism of how teachers dress, specifically concerning the "professionalism" or lack thereof in teacher appearance. This study aims to provide a much-needed affirmative response to discourses currently circulating about the need to regulate teacher dress. Since President Clinton's 1996 State of the Union speech calling for the regulation of student dress, policy-makers and the public have become increasingly engaged in discourses about the role of dress and appearance in improving educational outcomes. While originally these discourses were concentrated upon what students should or should not wear, in recent years attention has shifted to defining what is and isn't "appropriate" teacher appearance. These discourses provide evidence not only that there is an incubating movement to establish dress code and/or uniform policies for teachers, but also of a more subtle and sinister underlying ideology to erase teacher agency, individuality, and humanity from the educational process.

Up until the election of President Barack Obama, the country's dominant political climate could be characterized by what Lakoff has referred to as "Strict Father Morality," one that "requires that there be natural, strict, *uniform*, unchanging standards of behavior that must be followed if society is to function" (Lakoff 2002, 90, emphasis mine). Only time will reveal how President Obama's leadership and education policies will play out in the classroom and national feeling towards education and teachers.

Cognizant of the politically conservative attitudes of the very recent past, it is sincerely hoped that this research will not be perceived as an effort to “uniform” – physically, ideologically or pedagogically – the teacher workforce. By contrast, it is hoped that the research will enable teachers and policy-makers to recognize the value of teacher individuality of expression: As future fully-participating citizens of this society, students have a great deal to learn from being exposed to and gaining understanding of the diversity of ideologies teachers bring with them to instruction – be they materialized in teacher dress/appearance or not – as developing this awareness will better prepare them for navigating societal challenges beyond the classroom walls.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study is directed to investigating urban high school teachers’ dress practices as an expression of how they perceive their professional teacher role. It is not designed to support or refute a given theory about the function of dress in teacher’s lives, but rather investigate the meanings that teachers attach to their dress practices in relationship to their professional roles in the schools.

### **Research Questions**

The study was directed to examining the following research questions:

- 1. What role does *dress* play in the construction of the teacher self?**

Following Entwistle (2002) the term ‘dress’ is used to refer to clothing, shoes and accessories worn in the social performance of daily life activities. As

an extension of this definition, it is assumed that teachers make choices of their dress for work that they perceive as different from other social and situated occasions in their lives. This question is directed to exploring how teachers may use dress to construct a 'self' in their teacher role.

**2. To what extent do teachers use dress as an expression of instruction, personal ideology or agency in the schools?**

This question is directed toward the potential use of teacher dress to resist the often tacit but ubiquitous educational directive for "teacher efficiency," a directive that neglects the importance of the humanistic aspects of teaching.

The humanistic aspects involved in teaching have been questioned, minimized and even dismissed by policy-makers and conservative scholars of education for many decades (Imig and Imig 2006; Ornstein 1993). Since the adoption of the 2000 No Child Left Behind legislation, particular attention has been paid to "teacher effectiveness." Conservative critics have frequently placed blame upon teachers for being "ineffective" when students fail to achieve high scores on standardized tests. In response to this, teachers have been compelled to "teach to the test" to ensure that students perform well, the ultimate measure by which teachers are assessed in the current educational environment. In teaching to the test, teachers sacrifice creative and original instructional strategies to be able to "cover" a broad range of content and skills in a short period of time. In the end, a significant amount of the teacher's instructional and curricular

freedom and innovation is suppressed in the interest of promoting standardized test performance, leaving many teachers feeling stifled, frustrated and impotent.

Given that many teachers must perform their teaching responsibilities in a professional environment that has displaced their desire to invent and experiment instructionally, the question above addresses the possibility that teachers may use their choice of dress for work as one of the few areas in which to express their individuality and creativity as well as their resistance to an oppressive professional environment. Moreover, the question allows for the possibility that teachers may use appearance to instruct a 'covert' personal curriculum for which there is no standard for determining their "efficiency."

### **Significance of the Study**

As an investigation of teacher dress as an expression of how teachers perceive their professional role, this dissertation is oriented towards serving three larger purposes within the field of education:

- 1) To provide greater understanding of the complex ways that teacher dress practices and discourses about them serve to mediate personal, popular and State ideologies of the purpose and meaning of being a teacher, teaching and the teaching profession.
- 2) To enable teachers to feel empowered through collaborative participation in the research process to reflect upon their practices and beliefs in ways that are meaningful

and applicable to their professional development. As Kincheloe (2003) has pointed out, teachers are often the *subjects* of educational research but have few opportunities to become active researchers of their own daily practices. Given this, study provides an opportunity for teachers to engage in thinking about upon how they perceive their role as teachers in new, creative, and personally illuminating ways.

3) To interrogate the meaning of “teacher performance” in terms of what it means to be a “professional” teacher. While a discussion of whether teachers’ dress practices correlate in any measure to teacher effectiveness falls outside the scope of this dissertation, the study examines the meaning of teacher “professionalism,” – a word imbued with a multiplicity of meanings – from the teachers’ point of view. As will be discussed later, approaching this question from the teachers’ perspective serves to provide a thoughtful response to the remarkably negative attitudes toward teacher dress held by many, among them politicians, educators, administrators, and popular and non-teaching observers of the teacher workforce.

4) To contribute to the effort to re-humanize theorizations about the teaching and learning experience. Going beyond the investigation of teacher dress, self-presentation and/or body, the study is directed towards how teachers may draw upon understandings of all the senses – including the public, visual “look” we construct and present as teachers to others – to “re-sensitize” how we theorize about and engage in pedagogical practice.

It is highly hypocritical, and oppressive, when professional educators attempt to present ourselves to students as body-less, sense-less, and de-emotionalized beings, as doing so covertly expresses that these aspects of our lives do not and should not matter. In order to liberate students to realize their fullest human potential, schools need to raise awareness that humans are both cerebral *and* sensual beings. Indeed, many of life's greatest physical, emotional and spiritual pleasures and understandings of the world are derived from our senses of sight, hearing, taste, touch and smell. In this spirit, educators and educational researchers need to challenge attitudes towards *epistemologies of the flesh* by exploring, understanding, and cultivating in students, ourselves, and other members of the academic community an appreciation of the body and physical senses to the same extent as the intellect.

### **Definition of Terms**

As there are different ways to interpret terms, for the purposes of this study the following definitions will be used:

*Teacher role perception* is a term adopted from Keltcherman's (2009) notion of teacher *task perception*. In the study the term 'teacher role perception' will be used interchangeably with 'how teachers perceive their teacher/professional role' and 'professional teacher role.' Teacher role perception is of key importance to the study as it offers a broad conceptualization of the teacher's view of his/her professional pedagogical role, which, as stated above, the researcher assumes is expressed through dress. Following Keltcherman's term, teacher role perception encompasses

... the teacher's idea of what constitutes his/her professional program, his/her tasks and duties in order to do a good job...it reflects a teacher's personal answer to the question: what must I do to be a proper teacher?...[Role] perception reflects the fact that teaching and being a teacher is not a neutral endeavor. It implies value-laden choices, moral considerations... (and) encompasses deeply held beliefs about what constitutes good education, about one's moral duties and responsibilities in order to do justice to students. (Kelchtermans 2009, 262)

In sum, teacher role perception includes not only the teacher's concrete understanding of what is expected of him/her as a professional teacher, but also the personal and ethical dimensions of carrying out the role.

*Teaching style* is a term that has been used to describe different things. While some scholars who use it to describe *teaching technique or method*, most researchers who have defined *teaching style* refer to style as a "predilection toward teaching behavior and the congruence between an educator's teaching behaviors and teaching beliefs" (Heimlich and Norland 2002, 17). In this study, *teaching style* is used to describe one or more of the following: Choice or curriculum and/or approach to it; choice or assessment and/or approach to it; choice of classroom activities; and choice of instructional strategies. Additionally, *teaching style* includes teacher use of physical/facial expression as well as other body gestures in instruction (Firth 1978; Galloway 1979).

*Teacher self* will be use is in this study to describe the person-as-teacher within the context of the school culture and classroom. Following Goffman, (1990 [1959]) the

study assumes that the teacher self is a projection of a person's self into the world of teaching and education. The teacher self involves a set of understandings and constructions of what teaching is and should be, the roles that teachers play in the classroom, school and world. Importantly, the teacher self is a set of behaviors and practices that are articulated through speech, mannerisms, grooming and dress (Weber and Mitchell 1995; Goffman 1990 [1959]).

*School culture* is a term that some participants referred to as playing a role in their dress decisions. While this was not a term that was pre-defined for teachers, over the course of data collection it became clear that the school's culture dictate "correct" or "incorrect" behavior. As a departure point for a definition, the research borrows Schein's (2004) definition of culture in reference to organizations: "a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that has worked well enough to be considered valued and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems" (Schein 2004, 12). In reference to schools, then, school culture is defined as the set of assumptions and practices of a given school that teachers (and students) have learned and adopted into practice as a means successfully negotiating the school environment.

*Professionalism* is a complex term that was invoked the most frequently in analyses of print media that address teacher dress as well as in interviews with study participants. This word also appeared to be the word of choice in discussions about teacher dress that the researcher had with individuals both outside and within academia

and field of education. Within the field of education scholarship there has been significant discussion about the definition and characteristic of a 'professional teacher' (Darling-Hammond 2005, 2005; Darling-Hammond et al. 2009; Wise and Darling-Hammond 1984; Loughran 2006). At the same time, there have also been those who have contributed to the discussion surrounding the status of teaching as a "profession," a "craft" (Pratte and Rury 1991) or its own "discipline" (Loughran and Russell 2007).

Without discounting the relevance of the work of these scholars to the present study, the researcher has developed a definition derived data collected during the study as well as from multiple conversations with teachers, administrators, non-teachers, students and individuals completely disinterested with the research over the nine year period of study. When encountering this term the reader should assume the meaning of *teacher professionalism* to be: *Having a tacit understanding of what is universally socially appropriate in terms of dress, speech and manners for the teaching environment that is enacted by the teacher on a daily basis in the school environment.* Following this, a *teacher professional* is one who possesses these qualities.

*Liberal* and *Conservative* are terms that merit particular attention. Over the course of the research it became evident that participants used the terms *conservative* and *liberal* not only to describe their political orientation, but also teacher or teaching qualities, philosophy, morality, teaching styles and cultural backgrounds. In sum, teachers used these terms to describe both the kind of person and teacher they or others are. As will be discussed later, these constructions of self or dress style as liberal or conservative were significant in their material translation into dress practices for work.

The definitions for *liberal* and *conservative* are grounded in Lakoff's *Moral politics: how liberals and conservatives think* (2002). With Lakoff as a starting point, the definitions of *liberal teacher* and *conservative teacher* have been derived from teacher interviews, the process of which is discussed in detail in Chapter 4. These definitions should be taken as extensions of the teachers' self-identified political orientations.

Following findings from teacher interviews, *liberal teacher* will be used to denote one who is *approachable, caring, diverse, experimental, free, innovative, open-minded, professional* and *serious*. Likewise, *conservative teacher* will refer to one who is *caring, moral, professional, rigorous, serious stable, strict* and *traditional*. It should be noted that *caring, serious* and *professional* are terms shared by both definitions of liberal and conservative teachers, a finding that will be discussed later.

### **Assumptions**

This study was undertaken with several assumptions. The first of these is that study participants had some preconceived ideas of how teachers do or do not dress. Next, it was assumed that teachers are sensitive to the school and local culture in which they live and work. Lastly, the researcher assumed that factors such as the teacher's religion, gender, social class, race, ethnicity, age, life experiences and the social/physical school environment serve to inform and influence how teachers mediate how they choose to dress for work.

## **Organization of the Study**

This study is organized into six sections. In Chapter 1, the context of the problem, historical background, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, the research question, significance of the study, definition of terms, assumptions and organization of the study are discussed. Chapter 2 provides a review of the literature. In Chapter 3, the researcher discusses the study's methodology. Chapter 4 addresses procedures for data collection and analysis. In Chapter 5, the paper presents a discussion of study findings. Lastly in Chapter 6, study conclusions and implications for research, policy and practice are discussed.

## Chapter 2

### LITERATURE REVIEW: PIECEWORK

#### Introduction

Putting together a review of the literature that address the study's question was somewhat evocative of trying to piece together a quilt with odd fabric scraps. Literature was pursued from a variety of sources. Having researched literature databases in English, French and Spanish from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to present in the fields of anthropology, cultural studies, education, fashion studies, history, and sociology, the researcher can comfortably assert that there are relatively few studies that address the role of teacher dress, body, or self-presentation in pedagogy and/or educational settings: To the best of the researcher's knowledge none specifically investigates public urban high school teachers' use of dress as an expression of their teacher role.

In consideration of this relative lack of similar scholarly investigation into this area of inquiry, discussion below is organized into three sections: Articles and studies that investigate educator dress practices as social identity; historical articles/studies that are the most interesting and relevant to the topic; and findings of the researcher's analysis of discourses about teacher dress published in newspapers and professional journals/magazines from 1984 to 2006. It is worth noting that since concluding that analysis, research of more recent articles was also undertaken during the period from July 2006 through March 2010. While eight articles were identified, no new discourses

have been added to discussion of teacher dress. If anything, these articles have served to lend support to the findings of the initial analysis.

### **Dress and Appearance in the Construction of Social Identity**

There is extensive literature about the relationship of clothing and appearance to the construction of social identity, much of which emerges from the fields of anthropology, sociology and semiotics. The works of Barthes (1990), Bourdieu (1990), Davis (1992), Entwistle (2002) and Featherstone (2001) were very influential in the formation of this research topic several years ago. Readings in these ultimately lead to a search for less “canonical” research emerging from the fields of education and cultural studies in the hope that there might be more current research directly addressing the question of the relationship between teachers and their clothing/appearance. The following is a discussion of some of the articles encountered during this more recent search and the issues they have raised for the research.

Written by school administrators, the titles of articles such as *Teachers should dress for success* (Simmons 1996), *Blue denim blues* (Waggoner 2002), *Attending to teacher attire* (Sternberg 2003) and *Dress code for teachers?* (Million 2004) signals the disapproval that many school administrators have for how teachers dress for work. While the first three articles are essentially “opinion pieces” about the importance of how teachers look in terms of gaining the respect of students and their families (an importance that is unsubstantiated with evidence beyond the administrator-authors’ conjectures), the last article reports the findings of an e-mail survey of principals from across the country,

most of whom did not have a formal staff dress code but who agreed that “the professional dress for teachers was not only necessary, but showed respect for the school and had a positive impact on student behavior.” (Million 2004) While the study itself is questionable in terms of overall data collection issues (i.e., the number of principals contacted, the selection process, the questions asked – none of which is presented), the tone of the article and its conclusions brilliantly highlight the kind of findings and monological researcher bias that this researcher has endeavored to *avoid*: Teacher-as-non-self-respecting-non-professional and what-those-unthinking-teachers-need-to-do-to-shape-up. Indeed, all four of these articles reinforce not only the hierarchical tensions between school administrators and teachers and notion that teachers are to blame for the lack of student success, but also completely ignore larger social, political, economic and ideological forces as those discussed by Feagin (2001) and Giroux (1997). As these four articles offer little beyond further evidence of the current anti-teacher climate in education they are not of particular interest to the study, although they do attest to the interest many educators have in discussing how teachers dress for work.

While not directly concerned with teacher appearance and clothing, *The impact of teachers' personal lives on professional role enactment: a qualitative study* (Pajak 1989) interested me because of the methodologies used to collect data, and the oblique liberal tone of what otherwise appears to be a fairly traditional “scientific” study. Using information collected in open-ended surveys from a random sample of 200 teachers, the article reports data that provide insight into teachers’ perspectives regarding the impact of personal-life factors on their work lives. Drawing attention to the “noticeably absent”

perceptions and voices of teachers in the debate concerning the restructuring of rewards and working conditions in schools, the article is oriented to raising the awareness of policy makers and others of the need to avoid “viewing the self of the teacher as unitary or binary (personal-professional) cognitive structure” and to “suggest that a multifaceted self may be a more appropriate representation of how many teachers relate to the world.” (Pajak 1989) While the approach to data collection in Pajak’s study is significantly different from the researcher’s, the current study is aimed towards continuing Pajak’s work in showing the “multifaceted” ways that teachers relate to the world.

As a researcher, it is intriguing to consider the possibility that a mixed methods (quantitative and qualitative) study could render any meaningful or interesting information about teachers’ personal lives as they intersect with their professional ones. Race, class, and gender played passing roles in data collection and analysis, and as such this study could not be classified as particularly multilogical or critical in its perspective. The study conducted by two professors working in Departments of Curriculum and Supervision and Educational Administration (University of Georgia) is unlike the articles written by working school administrators because the tone of the article is very pro-teacher. Although it is not successful in doing so and despite its traditional “scientific” look and methodology, the article appears to be attempting to reject the positivistic traditions of viewing phenomena and people in unitary or binary ways. It is not clear whether this article has had any significant impact upon any kind of

educational policy, but it is reassuring to know that there are others “out there” working in education from similar ideological and epistemological perspectives.

From the discussion of the articles above it should be clear that inquiry into the meaning and purpose of teacher dress has not been entirely dismissed from scholarly consideration. As stated at the outset, the current study is oriented towards filling a void in what has been investigated about how high school teachers construct their “teacher identity” through dress. In doing so, it is hoped that diverse array of spectrum of teacher “identities” will be represented through a conscientious collection of data from the teachers themselves.

### **Articles and Studies**

There is a large gap of time between when the first articles about teacher self-presentation began to appear and more recent literature concerned with this issue. In fact, one can more or less neatly divide both the literature concerning teacher self-presentation and time period (early 20<sup>th</sup> century through the present) into two categories: *artifact* documents (pre-1970s) and *analysis* documents (post-1970s).

### ***Artifact Documents***

Published by teachers and administrators in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, articles such as *The Characteristics of an Efficient Secondary School Teacher* (Ballou Jacobs 1904), *Wherewith Shall We Be Clothed?* (Anonymous 1920), and *The School-Teacher Stereotype* (McGill 1931) demonstrate high concern for teachers’ health, hygiene and appearance

not only in relationship to defining teaching as a “profession”, but also to ensuring that teachers served as positive *physical* role models. As historical artifacts, these articles are interesting because they offer anecdotal details about what it was like to be a teacher in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, albeit described in a mostly plaintive and moralistic tone. Judging from these articles’ discourses about the *need* for teachers to dress in way that is *respectful* to the teaching profession, the teacher body and clothing during this era were particular objects of social concern.

The search rendered only one article about teacher dress and appearance that draws upon historical artifacts such as the above: Perillo’s article “Beyond ‘Progressive’ Reform: Bodies, Discipline and the Construction of the Professional Teacher in Interwar America” (2004). Using teacher personal diaries, teacher training documents and other “official” texts produced by school boards, Perillo demonstrates how during the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the teacher (predominantly female) body was an object of great fascination, highly controlled and “disciplined” by the State (as manifested in regulations about weight, grooming, and dress) as a means of defining the teaching profession and the societal role/status of women.

Perillo’s article is particularly interesting because it demonstrates the State’s historic interest in exercising control over teachers on a visceral level. According to Perillo, teachers could be and were dismissed from their positions for not conforming to State regulations on appropriate weight, grooming or dress. Although the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act prevents individuals with significant obesity or other physical challenges from being dismissed from their positions, that fact that there is a

growing number of New York City public schools that have teacher dress codes (Martin 2008) and that “teacher appearance” is still listed as the evaluation criterion indicates that how teachers look is still of high concern today – at least in New York City.

### *Analysis Documents*

Research efforts revealed no literature that specifically addressed the issue of teacher appearance in public elementary and secondary schools during the 1940s, '50s and '60s. In the 1970s, '80s and '90s, however, a flurry of articles began to appear again about teacher self-presentation, no doubt initially in response to changes in dress styles concurrent with the social and cultural upheavals of the 1960s. Essentially, there are two categories of articles: law-focused articles, and appearance-effect studies.

In the 1970s, teacher appearance and the law was the topic a notable amount of scholarship. Law-focused articles such as *On the Cutting Edge of the Law: The Expansion of Teachers' Rights* (Schimmel 1974), *Freedom of Expression for Teachers in the Public School Classroom* (Sponseller 1977), *Dress Codes for Teachers* (Phay 1979) and *The Courts and Teacher Grooming* (Ceccoli 1980) concentrate specifically upon the legal rights of teachers in freedom of expression in dress. They primarily discuss specific court cases about teachers who brought suit against school districts that had fired them over their self-presentation (most of which concerned male teacher grooming) and the outcomes of these cases. Lastly, the relatively popular and growing interest in this topic can be found in a dissertation entitled *The Legal Aspects of Teacher Dress and Grooming in the United States*. (Tyner 1980) To the best of the researcher's knowledge, this dissertation is the

only scholarly work undertaken before the 1990s that addresses the topic of teacher appearance.

That so many of these law-focused teacher dress/grooming articles began to appear in the 1970s may be better understood in relationship to the Supreme Court's *Tinker* decision that set the standard for cases involving attempts to regulate student and teacher appearance in the schools. Since the landmark *Tinker v. Des Moines Independent School District* (1969) Supreme Court decision that determined students "do not shed their constitutional rights to freedom of speech or expression at the schoolhouse gate" and concluded that student expression is protected unless it could be shown that a particular behavior would "materially and substantially interfere with the requirements of appropriate discipline in the operation of the school" or "collide with the rights of others", cases involving regulations upon teacher dress have often invoked the *Tinker* standard in defending the teachers' right of self-expression in schools (DeMitchell 2000; Brunnsma 2004).

While in some instances the courts have ruled in favor of the teachers, historically the courts have upheld the school administration when the application of a teacher dress code was reasonable and intended to serve a legitimate purpose. In sum, some decisions have favored the school boards and districts, while others have favored the teachers: The unique circumstances in each case make it impossible to establish any trends or judicial tendencies. As such, the law-focused articles can be summarized as efforts by scholars to try to make sense of court's lack of consensus on this issue.

Appearance-effect articles such as *An Analysis of the Relationship between Teacher Effectiveness and Teacher Appearance* (Menard 1974), *Some Effects of Teachers' Style of Dress* (Rollman 1980), *Clothing and Dress – Symbols of Stratification in Schools and Society: A Descriptive Study Revised* (Johnson 1982), and *Fashion in the Classroom: Effects of Attire on Student Perceptions of Instructors in College Classrooms* (Morris 1996; Gorham 1997, 1999) are directed to investigating student perceptions of teachers based upon their dress styles. Without exception, these studies rely upon quantitative strategies to collect data and focus on *student* perceptions of teacher dress. Using surveys with images of teachers dressed in a variety of styles, students were asked to numerically rate the degree to which they believed the teachers represented in these images possessed qualities such as “seriousness”, “approachability”, “concern for students”, “knowledge”, etc., the results of which were tallied and used as a departure point for analysis.

While the research does not oppose the use of surveys in collecting data, these studies overlook the relationship of self-presentation to context. Moreover, the data lacks the kind of richness that qualitative research could provide in areas such as students' beliefs about teachers' *intentions* in dress, teachers' pedagogical/political ideologies as expressed by appearance, and other aspects of the “who the teacher is” – in short, the kind of information that tends to emerge from collecting data from narrative and interview research strategies.

At first, it may appear paradoxical that the number of studies about student perceptions of teacher dress conducted at the elementary/secondary level was relatively low in comparison to similar studies in higher education. However as discussed above,

the question of teacher self-presentation in the schools has been mostly left to the courts to decide, which may explain the lack of scholarly research: After all, what does it matter what teachers *think* about their self-presentation so long as their right to self-expression in appearance is protected?

Another possible similar explanation for the lack of research in this area is that teachers' freedom of self-presentation has been more or less guaranteed by hard-won union contractual agreements nationwide since the 1970s – expressed by the attitude that “it’s the instruction that matters, not teacher appearance!” Lastly, as many scholars of fashion, dress and the physical body have asserted, inquiry into the role of fashion/dress has traditionally not been considered a “serious” or “legitimate” field of study (Crane 2000; Davis 1992; Entwistle and Wilson 2001; Paulicelli 2004). Whatever the reasons may be, this research firmly believes that it has been a serious mistake in educational research to ignore, discount and/or deny teachers' beliefs and attitudes towards the role of dress and self-presentation in pedagogy. As the below discourses about teacher dress indicate, interest in returning to State control of all aspects of teacher behavior has intensified significantly over the past few years, suggesting that in the near future teachers may no longer have the “protection” of the law or union contractual agreements to ensure their right to self-expression and choice in self-presentation in the schools.

#### **Analysis of Print Media Discourse about Teacher Dress, 1984 to 2006**

The number of nationwide newspaper or magazine articles addressing teacher dress in 1983 was triple the amount of similar articles from the 1950s through '70s

combined. This increase provides evidence of the ever-expanding conception that teachers are “unkempt” and hence “unprofessional” and in need of increased supervision and control. It is no mere coincidence that the renewed public discourse about teacher dress began right after the 1983 publication of *A Nation at Risk*, the US Department of Education National Commission on Excellence in Education’s report that ignited discourses about the country’s “crisis” in education. Since that time, and particularly after the passing of the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation, a steadily growing number of articles have appeared in the print media calling for the regulation of teacher dress, and there is no indication that public interest in this issue is going to fade away any time soon. As such, as an integral part of this study discourses in these articles have been collected and analyzed to gain insight into principal themes surrounding teacher dress that are currently circulating among education policy-makers, school administrators and teachers, as well as the non-education-related public. Ultimately, these findings have helped to frame questions for the proposed research study.

Data was collected from thirty-four newspaper and magazine articles dating from 1984 through February 2006 (see Appendix I for a list of these.) In reviewing these articles, the number of times that certain words appeared within the context of arguments for and against regulating teacher dress/self-presentation were counted and tallied. Any words that appeared fewer than three times were not included. Figures 1 and 2 synopsise the key words that are used in arguments for and against the regulation of teacher self-presentation. These have been grouped according to themes identified (in

bold) by the researcher; Figure 3 lists in descending order the clothing items most frequently named as “unacceptable” or “inappropriate” or “unprofessional”.

The findings in Figures 1, 2 and 3 (below) demonstrate that there is a wealth of interesting data that can emerge from the analysis of discourses in print media. A full analysis of these is certainly warranted, but doing so at present falls outside the scope of the current research. Discussion at present is limited to a few themes that surfaced from initial analysis of these documents.

<p><b>Figure 1: For the Regulation of Teacher Dress</b></p>
<p><b>Appearance is Material</b></p>
<p><b>“Professionalism”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Respect</li> <li>• Seriousness</li> <li>• Appropriateness</li> <li>• Public Regard</li> <li>• Salary</li> </ul> <p><b>Control</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Discipline</li> <li>• Authority</li> <li>• Strong Message</li> <li>• Adulthood vs. looking like students</li> <li>• Credibility</li> </ul> <p><b>Morality</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role Model</li> <li>• Wholesomeness</li> <li>• Thoughtful</li> <li>• Conservative</li> <li>• Dignity</li> </ul>

<p><b>Figure 2: Against the Regulation of Teacher Dress</b></p>
<p><b>Appearance is Immaterial</b></p>
<p><b>“Professionalism”</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Instruction</li> <li>• Respect for teacher’s self-regulation</li> <li>• Respect for teacher’s judgment</li> </ul> <p><b>Freedom</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personality</li> <li>• Comfort</li> <li>• Individuality</li> <li>• Creativity</li> <li>• Approachability</li> <li>• Ethnicity/Religious affiliation</li> </ul> <p><b>Environmental</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Destructiveness of environment</li> <li>• Mess</li> <li>• Grade-level and subject-level appropriateness</li> <li>• Low salary = durable, low-cost clothing vs. high style</li> </ul>

In Figures 1 and 2 it is intriguing to note that in both arguments for and against the regulation of teacher dress “professionalism” was the term most frequently used to frame arguments, although how it is used by each side is significantly different. As Entwistle has noted, “particular discourses of dress, categorizing ‘smart’ or ‘professional’ dress... are utilized by corporations to exercise control over the bodies of the workers within” (Entwistle 2002, 23). If one likens the United States public education system to a corporation (which is perhaps not such a far stretch of the imagination), one can see how discourses for the regulation of teacher dress suggest this same concern for controlling the bodies of teacher “workers.” “Professionalism” is the primary buzzword in discourses about teacher dress, and the ways that teachers construct the relationship between “professionalism” and dress will need to be explored further.

The differences between the arguments for and against the regulation of teacher dress in Figures 1 and 2 appear to echo the ideological differences between conservative and liberal “moral thought” described in Lakoff’s (2002) *Moral Politics: How Conservatives and Liberals Think*. Similar to Lakoff’s conception of adherents to conservative “strict father morality,” those who argue for regulating teacher dress place a high value upon “respect” and “credibility” in their teacher roles. Likewise, those who place a high value upon teachers’ “freedom,” “individuality” and “personality” reflect Lakoff’s conception of adherents to liberal “nurturant parent morality.” This apparent opposition is important to note. As will be discussed later, dress style choices

made by New York City public high school teachers were frequently conceptually framed one side or the other of the conservative-liberal divide articulated by Lakoff.

The apparent opposition between “conservative” and “liberal” arguments for and against the regulation of teacher dress can be best understood as a reflection of ongoing historical tensions of the bipartisan politics of the United States. In reflecting upon the data collected emerged from articles published during a span of more than 20 years there is no discernable shift from one ideological orientation to the other (i.e., from a prevalence of articles favoring liberal or conservative ideology during any given time period.) As such, it can be said that the pattern for articles arguing for and against the regulation of teacher dress tend to be published in symbiosis to one another. However, it is important to note that the total number of articles published about teacher dress and its regulation began to increase significantly in the 1990s and particularly after President Clinton’s 1996 address discussed in Chapter 1. Indeed, for almost every article for the regulation of teacher dress there has been an article against its regulation. What the data reveals is not so much the prevalence of one ideology over the other, but that there has been a notable overall increase in interest in how teachers dress for work.

The data in Figure 3 suggest many things. In comparison with all other garments named as “offensive”, blue jeans was by far the most frequently (and vehemently) cited. Globally popular and available in a variety of styles for an equally diverse range of price, how and why teachers wear jeans for work pose a particular challenge for the study. As Fiske points out, the “semiotic richness of jeans means that they cannot have a single defined meaning, but they are a resource bank of potential meanings” (Fiske

1989, 5). As such, it was not surprising to discover over the course of the research that teachers and administrators have much to say about the wearing of blue jeans in the schools.

**Figure 3: The Most Offensive Garments in Teacher Dress**

1. Blue jeans (or any jeans, for that matter)
2. Flip-flops
3. T-shirts (shirts with no collar)
4. Sweat suits
5. Short skirts
6. Shorts
7. Halter tops/tube tops
8. Spandex items
9. Capri pants
10. Birkenstocks
11. (Flannel shirts – mostly an issue in Maine)

When considered together, the “offensive” garments listed in Figure 3 suggests popular displeasure with teachers wearing garments that are “casual” and “sexual” in style, which by extension indicates the that teachers should not be casual, sexual beings. If we invert the argument, we can infer that the ideal teacher should dress in a “formal” and “asexual” style, and by extension be formal, asexual beings. While these findings are not altogether surprising<sup>2</sup>, formality and sexuality appear to be two areas of key concern in public discourses about teacher dress. While later it was not a complete surprise to discover that these are indeed two areas of concern for teachers, they were not central to teachers’ discussions of how they chose to dress for work, and had very

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<sup>2</sup> See Weber and Mitchell (1995) for a full discussion of the American popular conception of the desexualized, “non-descript” teacher.

little do with their expression of their teacher role perception. Rather, differences in opinion about the “appropriateness” of particular garments tended to reflect the teacher’s “conservative” and “liberal” ideological orientations discussed above.

As will be discussed in greater length in Chapter 4, research efforts and analysis were significantly influenced by information revealed in the analysis of discourses in print media. In many instances, prior knowledge of these discourses was very helpful to interesting and recruiting participants for the study, discussed in the Chapter 3.

## Chapter 3

### METHODOLOGY: FOUNDATION GARMENTS

Unseen, foundation garments can provide structural support and definition to our visible clothing. Similarly, the methodology relied upon for this study provides a much-needed structure and definition to the present study. The methodology is situated within four theoretical frameworks: anthropology and sociology, critical pedagogy, cultural studies, and fashion studies. In the sections below, each of these will be discussed, followed by an overview of the researcher's stance.

#### **Anthropology and Sociology**

Since the time when early sociologists and anthropologists such as Boas, (1891) Veblen (1899), Kroeber (1919) and Simmel (1957) began theorizing about the role of the body, dress, clothing and fashion as mediators of individual identity, social relations and culture, a truly prolific amount of literature has been produced to address this area of inquiry. In defining an approach the research has drawn from scholars whose ideas most closely articulate the researcher's own theoretical assumptions and considerations in carrying out this research.

Fundamental to the proposed study are theorizations that all social behavior is guided by how individuals situationally display the *self* to others. In referring to the situationally-constructed teacher "self" or "selves," the research has adopted Mead's conception of the social self:

...the self appears in experience essentially as a “me” with the organization of the community to which it belongs. This organization is, of course, expressed in the particular endowment and particular social situation of the individual. He is a member of the community, but he is a particular part of the community, with a particular heredity and position which distinguishes him from anybody else. He is what he is in so far as he is a member of this community, and the raw materials out of which this particular individual is born would not be a self but for his relationship to others in the community of which he is part. (Mead 1934, 200)

Understanding this construction of “self” is fundamental to Goffman’s theorizations in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life* (1990 [1959]). While the researcher acknowledges that there are significant limitations to this work due in part to the significant societal changes that have taken place since the era in which Goffman lived, this study nonetheless has drawn upon many of his frameworks in approaching inquiry.

Following Goffman, the research is interested in investigating teachers’ “own belief in the impression of reality that (one) attempts to engender in those among whom he finds himself” and similarly frame thinking about the topic around his metaphor of performance in describing social interaction. As Goffman writes:

when an individual plays a part he implicitly requests his observers to take seriously the impression that is fostered before them. They are asked

to believe that the character they see actually possessed the attributes he appears to possess, that the tasks he performs will have the consequences that are implicitly claimed for it, and that, in general, matters are what they appear to be (Goffman 1990 [1959], 17).

It is also assumed that all surface appearance – what Goffman refers to as the “personal front” – is the primary medium through which the self is performed situationally both in relationship to and in definition of social context(s). As such, how teachers deliberately or inadvertently construct and perform their “personal front” may reveal their teacher role perception as defined above. As Goffman asserts:

One of the most evident means by which the individual shows himself to be situationally present is through the disciplined management of personal appearance or “personal front,” that is, the complex of clothing, make-up, hairdo, and other surface decorations he carries about on his person...“(f)ront” is that part of the individual’s performance which regularly functions in a general and fixed fashion to define the situation for those who observe the performance. Front, then, is the expressive equipment of a standard kind intentionally or unwittingly employed by the individual during his performance (Goffman 1990 [1959], 22-25).

The above are very useful constructs, however as stated earlier there are limitations to Goffman’s framework. Tseëlon (1992) draws attention to the question of “sincerity” in self-presentation in relationship to Goffman’s work, which raises important questions for the proposed study that must be taken into account. Is teacher

self-presentation and discourses about it sincere expressions of their teacher role perception? Is their self-presentation a manipulative “means to an end” or a form of self-concealment/self-misrepresentation? Following Tseëlon, the proposed study will take into consideration that individuals’ dress practices are motivated by a multiplicity of possible factors, including the desire to self-conceal and misrepresent one’s intentions, beliefs, feelings etc. within the social context. As such, the possibility that teachers use dress as an *insincere* expression of how they perceive their professional role will be considered for the proposed study.

Another difficulty with Goffman is his lack of attention to the influence of class in self-presentation. Bourdieu (1990) argues that taste in clothes and self-presentation are expressions of the class into which individuals are born and reared and that are manifested in what he refers to as the *habitus*. Featherstone’s (1987) interpretation of Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* is particularly helpful in understanding the role of class not only in teacher’s choice of clothes and self-presentation, but also how these are corporeally performed, noting that:

it is important to stress that habitus not only operates on the level of everyday knowledgability, but is inscribed onto the body, being revealed in body size, volume, shape, posture, way of walking, sitting, ways of eating, drinking, amount of social space and time an individual feels entitled to claim, degree of esteem for the body, pitch, tone of voice, accent, complexity of speech patterns, body gestures, facial expression, sense of ease with one’s body – these all betray the habitus of one’s

origins. In short the body is the materialization of class taste: class taste is *embodied* (Featherstone 1987, 64).

In light of the above, it is essential to consider that the garments individuals wear take on meaning not only in relationship to the social context in which they are worn, but also in relationship to the wearer. As such, the manner in which teachers wear articles of clothing, as well as how these are combined with other garments, jewelry, make-up, etc., as part of their self-presentation must also be taken into account.

Extending Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*, the research approach does not consider class separable from considerations race, socioeconomic status, cultural/ethnic heritage, linguistic background and particularly gender. As Entwistle notes, "it is difficult to consider gender as a category separate from class, peer group and occupation, since the concept of gender is constituted differently by each, and is constituted differently according to the social context" (Entwistle 2002, 52). Given the racial, cultural/ethnic and linguistic diversity of urban populations and that the majority of the teaching workforce is female, Entwistle's extended notion of class is particularly relevant to interpreting the dress practices of teachers working in urban settings.

Another problematic aspect of Goffman's work is its neglect of the role of consumerism in influencing self-presentation, which is surprising considering he was writing in the postwar economic boom and burgeoning consumerist United States society of 1959. As Featherstone points out, consumerist culture plays a significant role in how individuals (be they teachers or otherwise) construct themselves:

The concern with lifestyle, with the stylization of life, suggest that

the practices of consumption, the planning, purchase and display of consumer goods and experience in everyday life cannot be understood merely via conceptions of exchange-value and instrumental rational calculation...Rather than unreflexively adopting a lifestyle, through tradition or habit, the new heroes of consumer culture make lifestyle a life project and display their individuality and sense of style in the particularity of the assemblage of goods, clothes, practices, experiences, appearance and bodily dispositions they design together into lifestyle. *The modern individual within consumer culture is made conscious that he speaks not only with his clothes, but with his home, furnishings, decoration, car and other activities which are to be read and classified in terms of the presence and absence of taste (Featherstone 1987, 58-9; emphasis mine)*

While the research approach assumes that individuals speak metaphorically through the medium of clothing and other consumer goods, we are no longer “modern individuals” but *postmodern* individuals. Reductionistically but tersely stated, postmodern society can be characterized by the perceptual compression of time and space resulting from innovations in electronic media communication and the general speed-up in the turnover time in capital. As Harvey notes, over the past two decades postmodern changes have had a disorienting and disrupting impact upon political-economic practice, the balance of class power, as well as upon cultural and social life (Harvey 1990, 284). If we accept Harvey’s assertion – as does the research – two specific aspects of living in a postmodern society are particularly relevant to the proposed study:

The relationship between the constructed, presented self and the situated context of “place”; and changes in how fashions are produced and consumed.

In a work published a few years before Harvey’s *The Condition of Postmodernity*, Meyerowitz asserts that a major difficulty in applying Goffman’s theories in contemporary society results from his conception of place and space as intransient fields within and against which individuals negotiate their self-presentations. He states:

While Goffman and many other sociologists tend to think of social roles in terms of the *places* in which they are performed... electronic media have undermined the traditional relationship between physical setting and social situation. Electronic media have created new situations and destroyed old ones. One of the reasons many American may no longer seem to “know their place” is that they no longer *have* a place in the traditional sense of a set of behaviors matched to physical locations and the audiences found in them (Meyerowitz 1985, 7).

Clearly, it may be difficult (if not impossible) to assess the extent to which teachers are influenced by this sense of “displacement” in their daily lives. What may be a useful, however, is to interrogate constructions of space and place in relationship to schools. For example, how do teachers define the “audience” for their performance of self-as-teacher? How do they define the teaching environment in which they are participants? How do discourses about teacher dress – be they teacher discourses or “public” ones disseminated via the media – contribute to defining the “audience” for

whom teachers present their professional selves? These are difficult questions to frame let alone answer, but this study will endeavor to do so.

As Harvey states, one of the major effects of postmodernity is manifested in how fashions are produced and consumed. He states:

The mobilization of fashion in mass (as opposed to elite) markets provides a means to accelerate the pace of consumption not only in clothing, ornament and decoration but also across a wide swath of life-styles and activities....The first major consequence has been to accentuate volatility and ephemerality of fashions, products, production techniques, labour processes, ideas and ideologies, values and established practices (Harvey 1990, 285).

Following this, it is assumed that to a yet-to-be-discovered extent teachers are attentive to trends in fashion, and that their dress practices may be influenced by the highly destabilized nature of fashion. How this may play out in relationship to their teacher role perception will be a challenging but interesting area of inquiry that the research hopes to address over the course of the study.

### **Critical Pedagogy**

A motivating force of undertaking research about human *beings* in teaching is to contribute to the effort to restore human, lived, and visceral understandings to current discourses about education. Following Susan Ohanian, the research is predicated upon the belief that “we teach who we are” (Ohanian 1999, 9). Personal experience has

demonstrated repeatedly that despite what teachers may think we are teaching, much of what students seem to learn from their experiences with us – including how we interact with them, other students, teachers, school personnel, and parents both inside and outside of the classroom – is how to *be*. That there is so little discussion about the role of the teacher as a human *being* in instruction can lead some teachers draw the same conclusion as many involved in critical pedagogy: As achieving standards becomes increasingly regarded by those with decision-making power as the primary objective of education, the teacher’s physical, lived role in educating students correlatively becomes regarded as inconsequential, an attitude that Ohanian and others have referred to as the *deskilling* of teachers (Ohanian 1999, 99). It is troubling that the current ideological “erasure” of the human *being* of the teacher from the teaching act, as well as perplexing by it as this ideology ignores everything scholars working in psychology and cultural anthropology such as Bruner (1996) and Lave and Wenger (1991) have suggested about the primacy of intersubjectivity and the situated, socially-contextualized nature of how human beings learn. As such, in approaching this research topic it is assumed that the dress practices of teachers within the intersubjective, situated, and socially-contextualized environments of schools play a powerful role in teaching students about social relations within and beyond the classroom walls.

Over the ten years of the researcher’s involvement in doctoral studies, it has become increasingly evident that the topic of inquiry may shed additional insight into the question of what it means to be a professional teacher and to current discussions about the meaning and purpose of education.

The research draws significant inspiration from feminist educational theorists such as hooks (1994), McWilliam (1996) and Shapiro (1994), and by pursuing this “unconventional” (non-traditional) topic the research seeks to challenge and peer beyond the overwhelmingly positivistic perspective that dominates current educational research. Following this, it has been highly instructive and useful to consider the thinking of postmodern and feminist theorists in framing inquiry. In keeping with Sherry Shapiro, the research approach maintains that “knowledge is always situated and constructed in dialectical relationship between the individual and the culture in which she/he lives...The body (is)...the preeminent material upon which inscriptions of culture and its particular discourses become embedded” (Shapiro 1994, 61).

Similar to Erica McWilliam’s interest in restoring the human body to theorizations about pedagogy, this research seeks “to depart from the tradition of framing the teacher-student relation as ‘the marriage of two minds’...and (to) re/member pedagogical work as inescapably corporeal, involving fleshly bodies, with all the pluses and minuses that this can mean for classroom practice” (McWilliam 1996). The research understands that discussions of the teacher as a *body*, even in relation to the abstract realm of knowledge, potentially leads to “dangerous” discussions of corporeality, Eros and sexuality, all of which traditionally are considered taboo topics in discussions about education. Nonetheless *and* because of this, it is believed that the educational relevance of exploring the teacher body-as-curriculum. Agreeing with hooks, this research is grounded in the belief that,

(t)he person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their own body...(It is important) to write about the presence of the teacher as a body in the classroom, the presence of the teacher as someone who has a total effect on the development of the student, not just an intellectual effect but an effect on how that student perceives reality beyond the classroom (hooks 1994, 136-137).

Ultimately, in keeping with these scholars this research is situated in the desire to contribute to the “process of bringing to awareness...the social/historical and cultural inscriptions which, though one’s body, shape a life, and through this knowledge makes possible the questioning and re-creation of the human condition” (Shapiro 1994, 62), thereby providing an opportunity for fresh conversations about education.

### **Cultural Studies**

This study draws upon strategies from cultural studies to uncover the ideological themes inscribed in mass-produced “texts” of popular culture (i.e., films, television programs, print-media, dolls, etc.) and how these contribute to how teachers construct their “teacher identity.” Over the eight-year research process it was discovered that cultural studies is the only field that has produced and continues to produce any significant amount of literature interrogating elementary and secondary school teacher appearance. While the works of Farber, Provenzo and Holm (1994) and Joseph and Burnaford (2001) have been consulted, this study found and Mitchell’s (1995) work the most useful for framing the research approach. Fundamental to their inquiry, they write:

In the ongoing deliberations of teachers' work and professional development, teacher identity is too often treated as unproblematic and singular in nature... 'How do you *see* yourself as a teacher?' A questioning of identity necessarily involves image-making. What role do the images of teaching in popular culture play in coloring the voices we use to speak our identity? (Weber and Mitchell 1995, 26)

Following Weber and Mitchell and other scholars such as Beyerbach (2005), Farhi (1999) and Raimo (2002) who have analyzed popular films about teachers, this study considers the potential influence of the teacher image in films in relationship to how teachers construct and present themselves. It is essential to remember, however that "teachers are not merely victims of society's cultural imagery. Although they are born into powerful socializing metaphors, some of them manage to break and recreate images while making sense of their roles and forging their self identities. (Weber and Mitchell 1995, 26) As such, the study also investigates teacher agency in self-presentation as possible expressions of resistance to, defiance or reinterpretation of dominant discourses of "what teachers should look like" as well as the meaning and purpose of being a teacher, teaching, and the teaching profession.

### **Fashion Studies**

The study of fashion and dress is a huge and highly complex interdisciplinary area of inquiry that involves (at the very least) understandings of aesthetics, economics, politics, history, sociology and anthropology. As such, the researcher has struggled to

find theoretical points of entry within this field for the proposed study, but after lengthy consideration those theoretical frameworks that best define and support my approach have been adopted. However, until this sentence this paper has used the terms *fashion and dress* synonymously. At this moment it will be beneficial to clarify these terms as they highlight aspects of the study of fashion that have been useful in framing the research's particular approach in this highly complex field.

As Entwistle states, several features comprise the commonly accepted definition of fashion: "it is a system of dress found in societies where social mobility is possible; it has its own particular relations of production and consumption, again found in a particular sort of society; (and) it is characterized by a logic of regular and systemic change" (Entwistle 2002, 48). For the purposes of this inquiry, this definition is extended to Paulicelli's as it captures the dynamic and macro and micro scales at which fashion operates: "fashion... has a twofold function, being at one and the same time both system and process, institution and individual act" (Paulicelli 2004, 148). Dress – our everyday practices of covering up the body with clothing – are structured not only by social forces of the fashion system, but also by issues of power constructed by social location, class, region, occupation, gender, race, ethnicity, income, etc. Moreover, "understanding dress in everyday life requires understanding not just how the body is represented within the fashion system and its discourses on dress, but also how the body is experienced and lived and the role dress plays in the presentation of the body/self" (Entwistle 2002, 39).

In light of these definitional considerations, fundamental to the research approach is the assumption that in urban public education, body, dress, fashion, and the discourses about them are framed by issues of power. As Entwistle points out, when considering dress as a situated practice, we need to move between “on the one hand, the discursive and representational aspects of dress and the way the body/dress is caught up in relations of power, and on the other, the embodied experience of dress and the use of dress as a means by which individuals orient themselves to the social world” (Entwistle 2002, 39). Therefore, for the proposed study of teacher dress within the context of urban public high schools, both the social forces of fashion *and* dress/body together will be considered as a means of understanding how they relate to each other – “how fashion structures dress and how dress always involves the creative interpretation of fashion by individuals” (Entwistle 2002, 55).

It is essential to understand that fashion and dress are both representational *and* discursive in nature, enjoying what Paulicelli describes as a “dual status as verbal and visual communication” (Paulicelli 2004, 61). As such, the study is not only confined to gaining understanding of teacher dress practices as they are lived experientially; rather, the potential meaning and purpose of visual representations *and* discourses about dress as they are produced by teachers and education policy-makers, as well as in popular culture and the media will also be investigated.

Following basic research questions such as ‘*how do teachers dress?*’ and ‘*what does their dress mean?*’, the question that invariably has shed the most light on the power dynamics embedded within the topic is ‘*how **should** teachers dress?*’ Judging from

preliminary research which included reviewing newspaper and magazine articles and interviewing a diverse range of educators, discourses about how teachers should dress revealed the degree of sensitivity, anger, and outrage surrounding this issue. From these discourses two particular social dimensions of fashion and dress have emerged that form the core of the study's theoretical framework: the relationship of dress to occupation; and dress as a site for institutional and State control.

As discussed earlier, a number of New York City Department of Education (NYCDOE) veteran administrators and teachers (with at least fifteen years of experience) were queried about their knowledge of established dress code regulations and opinions about the role of teacher dress in the teaching profession. While most had remarkably strong opinions on the subject, virtually all responded that in the NYCDOE mandating what teachers should wear to work was "illegal," and that any attempt to enforce guidelines for teacher dress would be an infringement of the individual's right of freedom of expression. Since 1974 when the United Federation of Teachers won its battle to eliminate teacher dress codes from the teachers' contractual agreement with the City, the NYCDOE has not attempted to impose a universal teacher dress code.

Over the past decade, however, many NYCDOE schools have begun to adopt dress codes/guidelines delineating standards for "professional" or "appropriate" teacher dress, although these are difficult to enforce because they are not part of the teachers' contractual agreement. In practice what usually happens is that when teachers arrive for work dressed in a manner that school administrators feel is unacceptable, they are sent home to change and/or are "given a talking to." Ultimately, some teachers choose to

transfer to schools without dress codes if they find they cannot conform to the dress regulations of the school in which are working.

Upon deeper analysis, one can see how the question of how teachers should dress is inextricably linked to whether one considers teaching a *profession*. As Dewey acknowledged in 1904, “the vocation of teaching is practically the last to recognize the need of specific *professional* preparation” (Dewey 1904, 10, emphasis mine), and judging the number of rapid induction into teaching programs that exist today, the belief that teaching is not a profession requiring specialized training appears to be held by many. In terms of fashion and dress, whether or not a person is a “professional” has a very significant influence upon her/his dress. As Entwistle writes:

A further aspect framing the clothing choices of individuals comes from occupation. While this might not affect all the decisions made about dress, only ones that pertain to daily working life, this experience of dressing can take up a significant amount of time, energy and expense. Many occupations within the working or lower middle classes prescribe a uniform or lay down clear rules of dress, restricting the types of garments and colors suitable for work. The professions, on the other hand, generally operate with loose codes of dress that are left up to the individual to interpret (Entwistle 2002, 51).

In light of the above, one of the fundamental areas of inquiry for the proposed study was to investigate how being a teacher, as mediated by dress practices, is considered a *professional* occupation.

In the shadow of federal efforts to impose a “universal” (i.e., State) definition of the meaning and purpose of education as manifested in the 2001 No Child Left Behind legislation, the struggle over defining teaching as a profession can be viewed not only as a simple matter of semantics and the esteem with which the public holds for teaching, but also as a site of the State’s efforts to control teacher individuality and to use the schools to produce workers to serve national and corporate interests. In *Fashion under Fascism: Beyond the Black Skirt*, Paulicelli demonstrates the State’s deliberate manipulation of the Italian fashion industry as a means of establishing national identity and unity. While the researcher does not suggest that the current United States government is identical to the Italian Fascist regime of the 1930s, the research maintains that an examination of State discourses about teacher dress warrants investigation as a means of gaining insight to the political dynamics of education today. As Paulicelli writes:

Fashion is a particularly illuminating window through which to observe mechanisms both of social control and resistance to that control...Through fashion we can identify the social and class agendas that go towards the shaping of political environments at both the individual and collective levels. From the perspective of communication and by way of the opportunity it offers individuals to play different roles, fashion offers a forum in which the imagination and desire have their say in the creation of one’s self. It is in the interplay of these subtle mechanisms that it is possible to see not only how the regime used

fashion to convey its multifaceted ideology, but also how fashion represented a platform for opposition to that ideology (Paulicelli 2004, 148).

Similarly, the research approach assumes that by examining dress practices and discourses about fashion/dress we can gain insight into the State's efforts to impose its anti-teacher ideology to regulate all aspects of education – teacher self-presentation, curriculum, instruction and assessment – as well as how teachers resist this ideology.

### **Researcher's Stance**

Following Madison (1988) and Van Manen (1990), this study “recognize[s] that it is the subjectivity of the interpreter himself which has *methodological primacy*” and that this recognition is essential because “only the individual, human, conscious, reflecting subject can be held *responsible* for what he or she says or does.” (Madison 1988) In this light, it is important to understand how the researcher's interest in this topic evolved and its influence in collecting and interpreting data.

The researcher's stance will be discussed in three sections. First, the methodological insight gained while conducting the pilot study for this research will be discussed. This will be followed by a discussion of the researcher's personal and professional orientations.

### **The Pilot Study**

In the summer of 2003 the researcher undertook a 6-week pilot study in conjunction with doctoral studies in the Anthropology and Education program at

Teachers College. This experience was later to prove to be highly instructive in developing a methodological approach for the present study.

The research was undertaken as a culminating assignment for a year-long course in methodology and required formulating a proposal for a 6-week summer study on a topic in a region of the world of interest, preferably one that was related to our doctoral interest and that would be carried out in the summer before the follow year's study. After seriously contemplating the assignment, the researcher chose to conduct a study on high school teacher dress practices in New York City.

Relying upon personal contacts within the NYCDOE, school administrators willing to provide a school venue in which to conduct research were identified. Similar to others' in the doctoral program, the researcher's principal objective at the time was to gain experience in some of the challenges of conducting qualitative field research to be better prepared for doctoral field work later.

Finding participants for the study proved to be one of the more difficult aspects of the research. While conceiving the study the researcher had not fully appreciated the differences between the regular year and summer session teaching population. First of all, many teachers who choose to work in summer school are not necessarily assigned to teach where they work the rest of the year. Secondly, and previously unbeknownst at the time, the majority of teachers who work during the summer are male. Lastly, summer school teachers do not tend to linger around the school before or after teaching hours. In other words, the set of circumstances particular to summer school made it

particularly challenging to find participants willing to spend time to share their points of view.

After having no success in recruiting participants during the school's two pre-session faculty meetings, efforts were directed towards repositioning the researcher's role in the like of the school. For the duration of the research period it was arranged with the principal that the researcher would become more of a member of the school community by providing services (*gratis*) as a substitute teacher, co-teacher, photocopier and neighborhood errand runner. After nearly two weeks of providing these services to the school community, teacher participants were re-canvassed and three volunteered to participate in the study.

Data collection took place in three ways: Teacher questionnaires about items of clothing they wore to work, face-to-interviews about their teaching histories and personal dress style and participant observations. Lacking any kind of data collection and analysis strategies, research involved keeping copious notes of interviews and observations in addition to the questionnaires collected. While these were instructive activities, ultimately there was no methodical analysis of these data as research efforts concluded when the researcher left the program.

While there was a great deal of valuable learning to be acquired from having done this qualitative researcher, in retrospect the researcher considers this experience to be an overall failure. Theoretically grounded only in anthropology and sociology, the most significant flaw in the approach was the complete disregard for the researcher's position of power in the research relationship. Simply stated, the teachers that were

interviewed and “observed” over the course of that study did not trust the person “researching them”, nor did the researcher give them any reason to in positioning herself as “neutral” and “disinterested.” Having come to a much greater understanding of the role of the researcher in the research process as a result of this experience, a primary goal of the current study was assemble an approach that not only would enable data collection into the area of inquiry, but also will allow such activity to take place in an open, collaborative and ethically responsible way that may benefit teachers.

Earlier research efforts revealed that the nature of this study poses certain research challenges, the most notable of which is teacher discomfort. Simply stated, asking teachers about their dress practices can be a highly sensitive and provocative line of inquiry. Following the hermeneutic phenomenological approaches forwarded by Madison (1988) and Van Manen (1990), for this study strategies have been developed to assist teacher participants in drawing upon their lived experiences of dress/self-presentation in the schools to enable them to create new meanings from and for their pedagogical experiences and beliefs.

During the research process some ethical issues became apparent to the researcher, surrounding teachers’ comfort levels with inquiry into their dress choices for work. The primary ethical issue involved power. Informants indicated concern about how the knowledge produced by the research would be used, by whom, and to what purpose. As Wolf points out, “whether we are talking about non-exploitative methodology in field research or authority in writing ethnography, we are talking about power – who has it, how it is used, for what purposes.” (Wolf 1992) In fact, almost all of

the teachers (the study “subjects”) that were interviewed asked: Who are you and why are you interested in this topic? Who are you reporting your findings to?

Research efforts did not extend to inquiring into what these teachers may have feared, mostly because all appeared satisfied knowing the stated purposes of the research. It is not hard to conjecture, however, that these questions were borne out of concern that the research could be used against them in some way, that some kind of judgment was being made about them, and/or that the research was some kind of covert activity being undertaken on behalf of the Chancellor that would ultimately lead to mandating a teacher dress code in the New York City public schools. In sum, the teachers’ questions about the purpose of the research were interpreted as expressions of concern that the study findings would hurt them in some way.

When it was discovered that teachers were unsettled by the nature of this research – as evidenced by their unwillingness to volunteer to participate in the initial study – the terms of data collection were changed for the current study. Teachers were informed that they did not have to be audio-taped and were give approval of all transcriptions of data-collecting conversations. This change did result in influencing many teachers to participate, although it also proved to be a highly laborious. In the end, though, by making the data collection process more participatory, teachers became more empowered in the research and more candid in sharing their views. This will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 4.

The approach taken in this study follows Smith’s assertion that “researchers must go further than simply recognizing personal beliefs and assumptions, and the

effect they have when interacting with people” (Smith 2002) and has taken very much to heart her questions about conducting ethical research in terms of conducting research in this study. Understanding that conducting research, writing up and sharing findings can be perceived as acts of imperialism, colonization and exercises of power and control, this study has attempted to frame data collection procedures and research questions in ways that are more inclusive of the perspective and concerns of the “subjects.”

As a former high school and current middle school classroom teacher, the researcher was particularly concerned with what the teaching community may gain from the study and how to eliminate or minimize any possible negative outcomes of the research. That said, however, as a scholar it is difficult to ignore some important questions worthy of exploration, and recognize that these may not be considered worthy, relevant or “nice” by the teachers being investigated. For example, an area of inquiry that interested the researcher but was not pursued out of concern for making participants uncomfortable as asking teachers to assess their teacher professionalism based on their dress choices. A particular area of concern was how exploring this topic with teachers could lead to a productive discussion about the philosophies they bring to teaching. An even more compelling area of concern has been for what purpose the knowledge produced by such a discussion should ultimately be used.

Aware of the position of power in the research relationship, the study has considered the potential conflict between the researcher’s own research interests, and the interests/concerns of the participants. As discussed earlier, efforts have been made to alleviate the tension between the researcher and the participants by granting them

control over their statements and the way they have been transcribed onto paper. Analysis, of course, remains the researcher's sole responsibility.

One area of concern that was not fully anticipated is the amount of discomfort many teachers articulated (or demonstrated via body language) in discussing their physical appearance. The reasons for this are no doubt very complex and related to a myriad of intersecting personal, cultural, gendered and other issues. Participating in the study was voluntary (thereby creating a self-selected study group of about twenty individuals which in the end affected the data collected): Most appeared very comfortable in completing written questionnaires by e-mail, fewer were willing to interviewed, and only one was willing to be photographed.

Another error committed in conducting the initial study was the researcher's complete failure to embrace the teachers' reluctance/resistance to being questioned in person about their clothing and appearance: Had their apprehensive attitudes been recognized and incorporated into the research approach, ensuing discussion about these with the teachers may have led to some interesting insights.

In retrospect, it seems likely that the research approach might have been able to surmount whatever feelings of discomfort the teachers had in speaking directly and revealing themselves if the researcher had become established as a trusted member of the community. The limitations of a short summer study prevented this from ever happening as the study was conducted over a six-week period during the summer session in a public high school, and many of the teachers did not know one another or their administrators – let alone the researcher – very well.

Beyond these conditions, in an effort to be “scientific” in the approach, the research endeavored to completely remove the researcher “self” from the research process. This translated into revealing very little about the researcher’s personal, non-researcher identity to those willing to be interviewed or any other members of the school community. A fundamental ethical and methodological error was made in terms of harnessing the researcher’s power position as an academic “investigator” to nurture a boundary between the researcher and the researched, one that was very difficult to transgress. This is methodological error that the current study has endeavored not to repeat, not only because it is unethical to treat human beings as objects to be examined and potentially exploited, but also because of a basic belief in the impossibility of ever being able to meaningfully conduct research into any area interest by such an approach. As so many theorists have asserted, it is impossible for the researcher to be neutral: This is what the researcher previously had tried to do by denying the complexity of the situated “self.”

As an extension of the above discussion of methodology, the researcher’s personal and professional history will be discussed. It is hoped that this will provide insight into the researchers’ orientation to the study.

### **Personal and Professional Orientation of the Research**

I grew up in a family in which physical appearance – thinking about it, planning it, discussing it – played a major role. In addition to participating in local politics, my father developed a national law practice that required him and my mother to travel to

frequently to attend regional conferences and conventions as well as entertain a great deal. Growing up in this environment, I came to understand that “working the scene” invariably involved a great deal of choosing how to present oneself to others. As such, I came to regard getting dressed more than just an act of protecting oneself from the elements, expressing one’s individuality or being comfortable: It was an act of constructing a social identity that contributed to being able to play a part in the public theatre of life.

I also became familiar with the tyrannical aspects of maintaining a socially “appropriate” appearance, such as the need for occasionally wearing uncomfortable clothes, controlling one’s weight, correcting crooked teeth, taming recalcitrant hair, speaking well and behaving in ways that conformed to the social situation. In my teens and twenties I greatly resented all the work and self-discipline involved in making myself presentable to others and essentially abandoned bothering to do so except (very reluctantly) for family occasions. During most of that period of my life I was a very overweight, purple/green-haired, funky thrift-shop attired “hippie” (my family’s term, not mine).

In deciding to become a teacher in my late twenties I realized I would need to “reinvent” myself by conforming to a modicum of physical “presentability” in order to be taken seriously as a teacher and get a job. My transformation took a year: I dyed my hair back to its original color, got my weight under control, donned a skirt, blue blazer and pearls – in short, I tried to look like the Ivy League preppy of my résumé – and ended up being hired by the second school I applied to. Since that time, I have

understood the value of conforming in terms of appearance as a means of becoming socially “acceptable” and getting my often unconventional ideas heard and seriously considered by others.

My own evolving understanding of the relationship between personal choice of appearance and societal judgment of those choices has sensitized me to the kinds of decisions teachers may be making in their choice of dress for work. As will be discussed later, this understanding enabled me to ask more probing questions of teachers who chose to thwart “conventional” styles of teacher dress, and be better prepared for their responses. During the eighteen years that I have worked for the New York City public schools – first as a teacher, later as an administrator, and now as a teacher again – I have observed a wide variety of teacher and administrator dress styles and grooming choices, running the gamut from those who were generally frumpy and unkempt to those who somehow managed to always look crisp and perfectly coiffed. In between there were Hawaiian shirts, tank tops, slippers, torn jeans, tee shirts with political slogans or popular brands, neon panty hose, nose piercings, baseball caps and orange hair. As a younger teacher I tended to wear jeans, turtlenecks and blazers, a style I considered somewhat collegiate, inoffensive and practical for the potential hazards of active high school classroom teaching. When I worked for a superintendent, however, I understood that I would need to wear suits, or at least I could no longer wear jeans, if I wanted to be “accepted” in my role as an administrator.

As discussed in the first chapter, over the course of this study I returned to teaching in two middle schools in the NYCDOE. While both schools serve similar

populations, have existed for roughly the same amount of time and are lead by young principals, the schools are notably different in their expectations for teacher dress. The first school, Lower East Middle School (LEMS), has a dress code for teachers. The second, Universal Middle School (UMS) has none. The experience both of discussing the teacher dress policies with the principals and with living these policies as a teacher have greatly informed my approach to data analysis in this study.

As stated above the schools in which I worked years ago as a teacher had were high school and had no dress guidelines for teachers. Unbeknownst to me at the time when I accepted the 2008 – 2009 teaching position at LEMS, the school has a “dress code” for teachers. This came as a bit of shock. As a researcher of teacher dress I was delighted, but as a teacher I was less so. Surprisingly, the dress code was articulated publicly only once by the principal, Leticia Perez, as “Dress for success!” Later, when I queried the principal about the dress code and pointed out that it was non-descriptive, she explained, “You know what I mean. We are trying to set a serious, professional tone for our students and you should take what you do seriously, too.” (Perez 2008)

On a practical level I had no idea what she meant. Eventually, I learned what the dress code meant in terms of dress by overhearing a returning teaching explain to teacher new to the school that the dress code meant that teachers could not wear blue jeans except when students were not present. After 6 months of working at the school and thinking over her response, I conjectured that because of her own youthfulness (she was 28) and that of the staff that there might have been a concern that the teachers both acted and dressed in a non-serious way. One way or the other, it was obvious that she

equated blue jeans with non-serious, non-professional dress, and regulating dress with a “dress code” was the best way to ensure that the teachers, the school, and she were regarded as serious and professional.

As a teacher I never felt compelled to challenge the dress guidelines of the school at LEMS even though I knew that I could not be fired for thwarting the “code.” I perceived the dress code as a symptom of the school’s traditional approach to education which I decided to “play along” with it rather than attempt to battle the school’s traditional structure. Instead, the following year I found a non-traditional school in which to teach.

Only after I was hired by UMS did I think to inquire about the school’s dress policy for teachers. While working on this dissertation the summer before the school year began, I thought to call up the principal, Lionel Guerrero, to ask both as a future teacher and a researcher what the dress policy was. His response was as follows:

There really isn’t a dress code for teachers. However, students are aware of the need to dress according to different situations, like for different kinds of field trips and school events. I leave it to the teachers to let students about how to dress both directly through instruction and by example. The dress code, if you want to call it that, is that how you dress should not interfere with instruction, like dressing in a way that could be provocative to students. (Guerrero 2009)

In consideration of the school’s instructionally non-traditional approach to education, I was not surprised by his response. During the relatively short time that I

have been a teacher at UMS I have observed all manner of dress ranging from suits, ties and jackets to jackets, jeans and “ethnic” garments. As a more mature principal (he is 46) with a more mature staff (the youngest member is 29), Mr. Guerrero does not appear to have the same concern about the seriousness and professionalism of his teaching staff. His concern instead appears to be about using teacher dress to instruct students about dressing appropriately for different situations. Stated otherwise, he appears to regard clothing as an instructional tool that, when used judiciously, can serve to enhance student learning.

As will be discussed later, one of the most frequent ways that teachers participating in the study conceptualize their dress choices follows the dichotomy discussed above. Interestingly, in this study “serious” and “professional” is the conceptual opposite of “non-traditional” and “experimental,” a dichotomy brought into unexpectedly sharper focus by my own recent experiences as a teacher working in these two schools.

### **Researcher Stance – A Final Word**

Ultimately, the purpose of undertaking research about how teachers dress for work is to help educators gain insight into, and raise their awareness of, pedagogy as a practice deeply embedded in ideology and epistemology. As dedicated to and excited by the topic as the researcher has been throughout, the ethical issues involved continue to be troubling. Over the course of the study, several administrators both at the school and Central levels have expressed an interest in seeing the results of this study. As a

result, it is hard not to wonder: Will this research be co-opted by others as a means of contributing to the current wave of educational research that seeks to find new and better ways to criticize and blame teachers for the failure of schools? How can the researcher set aside personal concerns so that data as is not misinterpreted to favor or disfavor teachers?

It is hoped that the above discussion illuminates the methodological approach taken in the study. The following chapter will now turn to the focus to the schools and participants involved in the study, as well as procedures for data collection and analysis.

## Chapter 4

### PARTICIPANTS AND PROCEDURES:

#### IN SEARCH OF TEACHER STYLE

### DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURES

#### Recruitment of Participants

Identifying schools for the study was not easy. Ultimately it required reviewing a list of superintendents that the researcher knew professionally, contacting these few individuals, and securing written permission to approach principals about the study. As it turned out, only principals who had known or known of the researcher professionally from the NYCDOE granted access to the schools to conduct research.

It is interesting to note that despite the increasing number of schools that have dress “guidelines” for teachers, none of the three schools participating in the study had one, and only Dactyl High School had dress guidelines for students. While the researcher did not actively seek out or seek to avoid these schools, the data collected is likely to have been significantly different. As mentioned at the end of Chapter 3, researcher taught for one year at a school that had dress guidelines for teachers. While it is uncertain how many of the teachers understood that adherence to dress guidelines was not part of their teaching contract with the City, the researcher observed only two teachers ‘violate’ the tacit rule of not wearing blue jeans. This occurred on three separate

occasions, and it is not known whether these ‘violations’ were instances of resistance to the guidelines or simply a matter of convenience. Moreover, during “dress down” days when students were not present, the researcher observed both a significant change and no change in what teachers chose to wear to work. This behavior suggested a variety of motivations behind teacher dress choices, including the desire to ‘remain professional’ at all times, the need to differentiate ‘professional’ and ‘casual’ attire, lack of resources to accommodate two wardrobes, etc. Understanding that schools with dress guidelines for teachers influence their dress choices for work, for the present study it is preferable that none of the schools have guidelines as the lack of these fully empower teachers to draw upon their own perceptions of their professional teacher role to guide their dress practices.

Data collection activities in the schools began in February 2007 and concluded in December 2008. The months of February – April 2007 were spent presenting the research formally at faculty meetings, collecting e-mail addresses from teachers willing to read about the research, and “hanging out” in the school communities before, during and after school to try to talk to teachers and have them become familiar with the researcher.

### **Data Collection Strategies**

During the first three months of the study, the researcher had several opportunities to meet with teacher participants informally at the school. After this initial recruitment phase, all participants were asked to complete a brief online

questionnaire in which they were asked to identify themselves. While it would have been ideal to follow-up these questionnaires during face-to-face interviews later in the school year, it was already May and very few participants were unable/unwilling to engage in interviews with the researcher. As a result, direct interview activities were suspended until the following school year.

As mentioned in Chapter 3, between the 2006 – 2007 and 2007 – 2008 school years six of the original fifteen study participants withdrew from the study, not because of the study itself, but because the participants chose to leave the NYCDOE for one reason or another. Rather than complicating the research, this turn of events turned out to be beneficial as it allowed the researcher to spend more time interviewing study participants.

Beginning in early October 2007, participants recruited from the previous school year were contacted for follow-up interviews for the surveys they had completed. After eliminating the “requirement” of video- and audio-taping interviews, the researcher offered teachers the following possibilities:

1. to be interviewed in person with the researcher keeping notes. Transcriptions of conversations would then be sent to the participant for review, changes and approval;
2. to be interviewed during a live online “chat”, the transcript of which would be used for the study;

3. to complete a written “interview” containing the same interview questions as those used in face-to-face interviews and the online chat.

All nine of the remaining participants elected the first option of being interviewed in face-to-face interviews. While this proved to be a logistical challenge as well as highly laborious for the researcher, over time this strategy proved to be the most comfortable and empowering over the data for the participants as it allowed them to edit and revise their own statements.

Each participant was interviewed twice, once during the fall of 2007 and once for follow-up interviews that continued through December 2008. Initial interviews lasted for approximately 45 minutes and were conducted in face-to-face at or near the school site. Follow-up interviews lasted anywhere from 15 minutes to an half an hour and were conducted by phone.

As stated earlier, interviews were not video- or audio-taped. Instead, records of data collected during both face-to-face and phone interviews were kept by taking notes on a laptop computer. Later, written notes of interview conversations were sent to participants via e-mail for review, revisions and approval. Three participants made additional states to clarify what they had said during interviews. Revised transcripts were then sent back for review and approval. It is important to note that only data that has been reviewed and approved by teacher participants were used in this study.

### **Research Timeline**

As discussed earlier, data collection took place in three phases:

- *February 2007 – April 2007*: Initial contact with the schools; questionnaire distributed and collected via the Internet; conversations with Central NYCDOE and UFT personnel.
- *October 2007 – January 2008*: Face-to-face interviews with teachers.
- *February 2008 – December 2008*: Follow-up phone interviews with teachers.

### Questionnaire

After presenting the study to teachers during faculty meetings and informal chats at the schools, as stated earlier teachers were asked to complete a questionnaire in which they identified themselves. The data collected in the questionnaire was using later in organizing and analyzing interview data. Questions were designed to allow teachers freedom in describing themselves while allowing the researcher a means to organize data along broad categories.

Recognizing the potential influences of racial/ethnic background, gender, age, marital status, political orientation and years of experience in how individuals choose to dress, the researcher asked teachers to self-identify in these categories. A copy of the survey teacher participants completed is given in Appendix III.

Three areas of self-identification on the questionnaire that need to be explained a little further are *subject taught*, *style of dress* and *political orientation*.

*Subjects taught*. Teachers were asked to identify the subjects they currently taught rather than their license area(s). While it falls outside the scope of this dissertation to examine the qualitative differences between subject area teachers,

experience and popular imagination have revealed there to be differences among teacher self-presentations across disciplines (viz. the gym teacher, the art teacher, the shop teacher, the physics teacher, etc.) As such, it is assumed that the subject that an individual teaches has an influence upon how he or she interprets the teacher role, and in turn affects dress choices for work.

*Style of dress.* The categories of style of teacher dress were derived from findings of data collected during the researcher's 2006 analysis of print media. It is important to note that the particular garments mentioned in these descriptions were taken from print media discourses of teacher dress, and were used variously to draw attention to whether or not teachers were dressing "non-professionally" or "professionally." As will be discussed later, the question of what is considered "professional" dress and by whom is a central focus of many teacher discourses about their own dress practices.

*Political orientation.* As discussed in Chapter 1, the researcher discovered that "liberal" and "conservative" were terms that participants used during the study to describe their teaching style, morality, worldview as well as their political orientation. It is important to note that teachers self-identified their political orientations without having been provided definitions of these, and before they were asked to provide a definition as part of subsequent data collection activities.

### **Face-to-Face Interview Questions**

Every participant was asked the same four questions listed below during face-to-face interviews. These questions were designed to address the study's two research

questions. Responses to these four questions were recorded by the researcher on a laptop computer during the interview and typed up more thoroughly afterwards.

While the four questions below represent the central questions that participants were asked, the researcher often asked participants to clarify some of their statements, or ask follow-up questions to some of the responses. Participant follow-up responses were included in the responses to the central questions.

Following face-to-face interviews, participants were sent a transcript of what researcher had recorded for changes and approval. Two participants changed small portions of the transcripts. Eventually all transcripts were returned approved from participants, and only these approved documents were later for data analysis. Face-to-face interview questions are as follows:

**QUESTION 1:** Describe your teaching style. Is there a relationship between your dress style and your teaching style?

**QUESTION 2:** Do you think that your students have an opinion about you as a teacher based upon how you are dressed? What do you think they think?

**QUESTION 3:** What is the most significant factor that has influenced how you *usually* dress for work (e.g. principal's directives, what you teach, what other teachers are wearing, the student population, your own beliefs, etc.)?

**QUESTION 4:** Educators and policy-makers often talk about "professionalism" in relationship to how teachers dress. Define "professionalism" and describe your feelings and attitudes about "professionalism" in relationship to your own dress style.

### **Follow-up Phone Interviews**

Following receipt of approval from all participants for the transcriptions from their face-to-face interviews, the researcher contacted each participant as available from May through December 2008 for follow-up phone interviews. The purpose of the follow-up interviews was to provide participants with a last opportunity to amend their original responses and/or to provide additional data not previously provided. Follow-up phone interviews lasted approximately ten minutes to an hour. The longer conversations lasted as long as they did because the researcher and participants ending up spending a lot of time swapping teaching stories before attending to the follow-up questions listed below:

- After having reviewed your earlier responses, is there anything that you would like to add or change in any of them?
- Now that you have had a few months to reflect upon this study, is there anything that you would like to add to the information you already provided?

None of the participants had anything to add to the data that was different from what had previously been stated. However, most reported finding themselves thinking more about what they work to work than they had previous to their participation in the study.

### **The Definitions of *Liberal* and *Conservative***

Over the course of the research it became evident that participants used the terms *conservative* and *liberal* not only to describe their political orientation, but also teacher or teaching qualities, philosophy, morality, and teaching styles. In sum, teachers

used these terms to describe both the kind of person and teacher they or other are. As will be discussed later, these constructions of self or dress style as liberal or conservative were significant in their material translation into dress practices for work.

The definition of *liberal* and *conservative* have been derived from the teacher interviews. At different moments during the interview process, the researcher asked each participant to clarify his or her use of terms *liberal* and *conservative*. For each participant, a list of defining words was compiled for both terms. Once this process had been completed for each participant, the researcher analyzed the lists for all the participants. To arrive at final list of defining terms for *liberal* and *conservative* the researcher compiled and counted the number of times that certain words or phrases were repeated.

Because participants used the terms *liberal* and *conservative* to describe the kind of teacher or person they or others are, in this study the terms will be used to classify the characteristics of the *liberal teacher* and *conservative teacher*.

The below list (Figure 4) represents defining terms that were repeated by five or more participants to define the liberal teacher and conservative teacher. These are arranged in alphabetically. Note that *caring*, *serious* and *professional* are terms shared by both definitions of liberal and conservative teachers, a finding that will be discussed later.

As stated in Chapter 1, *liberal teacher* will be used to denote one who is *approachable*, *caring*, *diverse*, *experimental*, *free*, *innovative*, *open-minded*, *professional* and *serious*. Likewise, *conservative teacher* will refer to one who is *caring*, *moral*, *professional*,

**Figure 4: Terms Used Most Frequently by Study Sample Teachers to Describe Liberal and Conservative Teachers (Listed Alphabetically)**

LIBERAL TEACHER	CONSERVATIVE TEACHER
Approachable	Caring
Caring	Moral
Diverse	Professional
Experimental	Rigorous
Free	Serious
Open-minded	Stable
Professional	Strict
Serious	Traditional

*rigorous, serious stable, strict and traditional.* These definitions should also be taken as extensions of the teachers' self-identified political orientations.

### **Procedures for Data Analysis and Question-Specific Coding**

This section discusses how data collected in the face-to-face interviews were analyzed, coded and organized.

### **Data Analysis**

Analysis of face-to-face interview data was undertaken in several stages. Data analysis was first organized by question. The researcher read and re-read the responses to each question to identify "themes" in teacher discourses. Themes were identified by

the repetition of similar or identical discourses in teacher responses. The themes identified by the researcher will henceforward be referred to *theme areas*.

Transcripts were then further analyzed to find the recurrence rates of specific words and phrases that appeared in the data. Similar words and phrases were grouped together if they expressed the same idea or concept to facilitate the counting process. Beyond undertaking this kind of analysis by reading transcripts and highlighting words and terms, this analysis process was greatly assisted by using the “find word” command in the Microsoft word processing program. The words and phrases identified during this will henceforward be referred to as *definition codes*.

Similar to the analysis of discourses of teacher dress in print media, definition codes that were articulated by three or more teachers, regardless of how many times these were voiced in individual teacher’s discourses, were counted as having significance for the whole study sample. Primary definition codes are those articulated by four or more of the participants in response to a particular research question. Secondary definition codes are those that were articulated by two or three participants in response to a particular research question. As such, secondary definition codes were elaborations of the primary codes, and in a certain regard, further definitions of the definitions for theme areas.

### **Interview Question and Questionnaire Codes**

Figure 6 presents the theme and definition codes arising from analysis of each interview question. Once data was analyzed and coded by question, the researcher

proceeded to analyze the data by the recurrence of theme codes and definition codes arising from data definition codes arising from data analysis in its entirety. These analysis activities represent the core of the study's findings which will be discussed in Chapter 5.

## **PARTICIPATING SCHOOLS AND INFORMANTS**

### **Introduction to the Description of the Schools**

Research activities involved three 9 – 12 high schools, two in Manhattan and one in the Bronx. Approximately 100 schools throughout the New York City were solicited by e-mail. Follow-up letters mailed to the same to the principals which were then followed up by as many phone calls as time permitted. Ultimately, however, it was through contacts of personal contacts in the Department of Education that enabled the researcher to gain audiences with principals to explain the research and earn their approval to speak with teachers. Data was not collected from any school in which the researcher had previously worked, or from any teachers known from current or past professional experiences. Below is a description of the school sites.

#### **Anapest High School**

Anapest High is located in midtown Manhattan and has a student population of 445 and a teaching staff of 37. Started in the early 1990s as an "alternative" high school (that is, offering non-test based assessment), since the No Child Left Behind legislation

began to be implemented in the NYCDOE in 2003 the school has had to make an uncomfortable transition to “regular” instructional and assessment techniques.

Approximately 25% of the faculty has taught for more than 10 years, and judging from appearances the majority of the staff is in its 30s or early 40s. The student population is comprised by 68% Latino, 28% Black, 2% White, 1% Asian and 1% Other. The class size ratio is 34:1, however low student attendance often produces classes with regular attendance of 28 students. The teachers interviewed expressed concern about the low level of skills in math and English language arts that the majority of students entered the school with. All the teachers reported satisfaction with the school but resigned that there was “just so much” they could do to help the students.

### **Dactyl High School**

Dactyl High School is located in the South Bronx and serves a student population of the following: 60% Latino, 35% Black, 3% White, and 2% Asian/Other. There are 34 faculty members, and according to the principal at least 80% of the faculty has 1 – 7 years of experience. During the time period of data collection there were 392 students, with a class size ratio of 27:1. The school was started in the late 1990s and received a great deal of support from a community based organization that underwrites most of the school’s extracurricular activities. The teachers interviewed expressed a high degree of satisfaction with the school, and all but one of them was involved in running an extracurricular activity. Dactyl is the only high school where data was collected that had dress guidelines for their students, and these were rigorously enforced by both

administration and the teachers. (Student dress guidelines were khaki pants or skirt, white or navy blue top, but no tee-shirts.)

**Figure 5: Theme and Definition Codes for Interview Questions**

Question	Theme Areas	Definition Code(s) <i>Primary codes</i>	Definition Code(s) <i>Secondary codes</i>
<p><b>Question 1:</b> Describe your teaching style. Is there a relationship between your dress style and your teaching style?</p>	<p><b>Representation</b> of dress and teaching style</p>	<p>Dress style as: --being --living --beliefs</p>	<p><b>Conservative codes :</b> Conservative, strict, traditional, formal, conventional, disciplined</p> <p><b>Liberal codes:</b> Liberal, unconventional, innovative, free-spirited, wacky, non-traditional</p>
	<p><b>Contradiction</b> between dress and teaching style</p>	<p>Dress style as: --concealment --validation of behavior inconsistent with appearance</p>	
<p><b>Question 2:</b> Do you think that your students have an opinion about you as a teacher based upon how you are dressed? What do you think they think?</p>	<p><b>Conservative teacher</b></p>	<p>Characteristics: --serious --strict --professional</p>	<p>Expectations, Achievement, Rigorous, Reserved</p>
	<p><b>Liberal teacher</b></p>	<p>Characteristics: --approachable --open-minded --professional</p>	<p>Fun, Expressive, Different, Innovative</p>
<p><b>Question 3:</b> What is the most significant factor that has influenced how you <i>usually</i> dress for work (e.g. principal’s directives, what you teach, what other teachers are wearing, the student population, your own beliefs, etc.)?</p>	<p><b>School Conditions</b></p>	<p>--Physical Environment --School culture</p>	<p>Mess, Destructiveness, Principal’s support, Pleasing the principal, Looking like others</p>
	<p><b>Concepts of Teacher Self</b></p>	<p>--Role model --Teacher “role” --Personal style</p>	<p>Professional, Business, Style, Mood</p>
<p><b>Question 4:</b> Educators and policy-makers often talk about “professionalism” in relationship to how teachers dress. Define “professionalism” and describe your feelings and attitudes about “professionalism” in relationship to your own dress style.</p>	<p><b>What’s Dress Got to Do with It?</b></p>	<p>---What you do vs. how you look ---Dressing to do the work</p>	<p>Value system, Responsibility, Knowledge, Being impersonal</p>
	<p><b>Dress to Impress!</b></p>	<p>--Role model for students --Dress to play teacher role --Dress to be respected --Dress for student comfort</p>	<p>Self-sacrifice, Dressing the part, Performance, Deliberateness, Discretion, Respectability, Regulation</p>

### **Trochee High School**

Located between mid-town and the upper West side of Manhattan, Trochee HS was started in the mid-1980s. Total student enrollment is around 425; total teaching staff is 35. Over 50% of the faculty have taught for 10 years and judging from appearances, aged 35 or older. The student population is comprised of 43% White, 23% Latino, 14% Asian; 17% Black, 3% Other. The school is known for being academically rigorous as well as offering non-traditional approaches to curriculum and instruction. Parent involvement at the school is unusually high in relation to other high schools. Class size ratio is typically ratio is 25:1. Student attendance is very high and the teachers the researcher interviewed expressed a great deal of satisfaction with the school.

In sum, the schools that participated may not have all been located in Manhattan, but they were similar in terms of student population size. The following section will describe issues surrounds teacher eligibility, attrition and participation in the study.

### **Eligibility, Attrition and Limitations of Participation for the Study**

Recruiting and retaining participants for the study was a much more challenging undertaking than first imagined. This section describes the issues faced by the researcher in finding participants willing and able to provide information during the study's twenty-month month period of data collection.

### **Eligibility of Participation**

It might have been much easier to recruit teachers for the study had not eligibility been restricted to teachers with at least five years of experience working in the New York City Public Schools. Because of this limitation, it was necessary to exclude many teachers with fewer years of experience who volunteered to participate in the study. Their voices, no doubt, would have served to enrich findings. In designing the study, however it was felt that teachers with five or fewer years of experience may not be as “committed” to the teaching profession and evolved in their thinking about the meanings of being an educator.

It is worth noting that several of the teachers the researcher interviewed expressed a great deal of skepticism about the longevity and “commitment to teaching” of their less experienced colleagues. The researcher can fully understand this sentiment having returned to the classroom and observed a particular remarkable number of teachers leave the profession after only 2 or 3 years of working at UNMS. It is unclear to the researcher whether the very high attrition rate is particular to the school, or simply reflects a larger citywide trend. Historically, though, there has been pattern of high attrition of new teachers in the NYCDOE. This, no doubt, accounts for the significant boost in pay that begins in a teacher’s fifth year.

### **Attrition of Participation**

As stated above, the study lasted for one and one-half years. This was due principally to an unavoidable disruption in the research. As a result, of the original 15

teachers interviewed in the initial months of the study, six left teaching before completing it. Two left the New York City area although whether they left the teaching profession is unknown; one left for a Fulbright fellowship; and the remaining three left teaching for other pursuits. While at first it may seem strange that so many participants left the NYCDOE, it is less so in light of the researcher's 2008 - 2009 teaching experience: Of the twenty-five teachers on faculty, fifteen left at the end of the year, twelve of whom have fewer than five years experience and none of whom plan to continue teaching. While this phenomenon may be unique to the school, it does cause one to reconsider the meaning of "professional" teacher not only in terms of a system of social understandings and performances, but also one of *longevity in* and *commitment to* the profession.

### **Limitations of Participation**

Throughout the study the researcher had many opportunities to formally interview administrators at the research schools, her fellow middle school teachers, and teachers outside New York City. While this might have provided some interesting insights the researcher chose not to do so because of a) the concern that the research sites' teachers would not be willing to speak frankly if they knew the researcher was also speaking to their supervisors, b) the few middle school teachers spoken to informally about the topic held very different opinions about appropriate teacher dress from the high school teachers interviewed and c) the need to confine research to speaking with high school teachers working in New York City.

The last section of this chapter will provide descriptions of each of the teachers who participated in the study, as well as a table that shows a breakdown of each teacher's descriptors by school, gender, pseudonym, self-described background, age, marital status, dress style for school, subjects taught, self-described political orientation, and years of teaching experience.

### **Discussion of Teacher Participants by High School**

Interviews with teachers rendered the most extensive data for this study. Identities of participants have been concealed by assigning participants and their schools pseudonyms. Over the course of the study, participants were asked to identify themselves in terms of the following: gender, ethnic background, age marital status, school dress style, subjects taught, political orientation and years of experience. Figure 6 below synthesizes these self-identifications, and is accompanied by a brief description of each teacher.

#### **Anapest High School Participants**

##### *Bill*

Bill, a Humanities teacher with 6 years of experience, was one of the two teachers still in their twenties (29) who participated in the study. A second generation Vietnamese-American, Bill chose to become a teacher because of the teachers he had growing up in San Francisco. At the time the researcher came to know him he was beginning to take courses to become certified as an administrator. He admitted that he

decision to work towards becoming an assistant principal or principal resulted in his conscious choice to change his style of dress from jeans and a jacket, to a business style. He had a lively sense of humor and appeared to take his work as a teacher very seriously. Unmarried, he

proclaimed that one of his next big goals was to get married soon (and he asked the researcher to introduce him to someone nice.) Politically he describes himself as conservative.

### *Tonya*

Tonya is a 36-year-old African-American, married, “Brooklynite” Humanities teacher with 10 years of experience. A no-nonsense heavy-set woman, at 6’ tall she commands a great deal of attention and respect from her students. Her dedication to teaching is self-described as “political” and “social.” Aware of the statement that her physical presence makes and because of her commitment to being a positive role model for African-American and other students of color, she often dresses in “ethnic” African clothes and jewelry, and makes a point of discussing these garments with students or others who may ask. She describes herself as politically liberal.

## **Dactyl High School Participants**

### *Danielle*

Danielle is a 30-year-old single Irish-American from Nassau County, NY. A former Teaching Fellow, Danielle nearly left teaching after spending three years at what she described as a “failing school” in the Bronx. A friend had told

**Figure 6: Teacher Participant Personal Data Collected from Questionnaires and One-on-One Interviews  
(Arranged Alphabetically by School)**

High School	Gender	Pseudonym	Self-described Background	Age	Marital Status	Self-Described Dress Style for School	Subject(s)	Self-described Political Orientation	Teaching Experience
Anapet	M	Bill	Asian	29	S	Business	Humanities	Conservative	6
Anapet	F	Tonya	Black	36	M	Ethnic	Humanities	Liberal	10
Dactyl	F	Danielle	White	30	S	Conservative	Humanities	Conservative	6
Dactyl	M	Mike	White	32	M	Conservative	Science	Liberal	9
Dactyl	GM	Russ	Latino	34	S	Conservative	Science/Health	Liberal	6
Dactyl	F	Annie	Latina	29	S	Casual	Spanish	Liberal	6
Trochee	F	Dee	White	32	S	Conservative	Social Studies	Conservative	6
Trochee	F	Rhoda	White	51	S	Casual	English	Liberal	22
Trochee	M	Lee	Black	40	M	Business	Social Studies	Liberal	7

her about a possible Humanities opening at Trochee three years ago and she had applied and gotten the job. Self-described as an observant Catholic, she normally wears a conservative style comprised loose slacks or knee-length skirt and a sweater or blouse to work, “trying not to draw too much attention to (her) body.” She is very active on the school’s School Leadership Team, the governing body of the school comprised of parents, teachers and administrators. She is the only participant in the study who

commuted daily to the school from outside of the City. Politically she identifies herself as a conservative.

*Mike*

At 32, Mike is a 9-year veteran science teacher who entered the profession directly following college. An Italian-Irish native of Staten Island, at the time the researcher met Mike he was working on applying for a PhD in Chemistry. A self-described “lapsed” Catholic, he considers himself a devoted family man and got married during the time period he participated in the study. His interest in teaching began as a result of a teacher he had in parochial school. His preferred style of dress is conservative, comprised of a jacket, slacks and tie. However, he almost always removes his jacket for lab demonstrations. Cognizant of his relatively short stature (5’3”), he informed the researcher that he tries to convey his presence by wearing “serious” clothes.

In addition to his teaching responsibilities, Mike is a coach of the school’s baseball team. For a time he considered going into administration but he has decided instead to pursue an advanced degree to be able to teach at the college level. He is very personable and outgoing with both adults and students. He considers himself as political liberal.

*Russ*

Russ self-identified as a single, gay, Dominican 34-year-old man. He has been working as a science teacher for 6 years, but during the year we met he was also working as the school’s interim acting health teacher as well.

Russ has been working at Dactyl for three years. When he arrived at the school he was “out” to his family and friends as well as to the staff of his former school. When he came to Dactyl, he was not sure whether or not the climate would “tolerate” being out. After a year, he decided that it was “safe” to start talking about his personal life, and was honest with his students about it when asked. He does not believe that his openness about his sexual orientation has either positively or negatively affected how he is viewed by his colleagues or students. If anything, he believes that it is reassuring to some students that the diversity of the faculty is accepted at the school. His preferred style of dress is conservative, but this is more out of solidarity with the students who have to wear a dress code than for any other reason. He describes himself as “liberal by default.”

*Annie*

Annie is a tiny (4’11”) Spanish teacher of Latino descent who has worked at the school for 6 years. Originally from East Harlem, Annie became a teacher because she was the first in her family to go to college and she “didn’t know what else to do.” Fervently single, she is a passionate salsa and merengue dancer, and she integrates this instruction into her classes. Has one of the two youngest participants in the study, she explains her jean-and-tee-shirt casual style as a reflection both of her desire to be considered young by her students, and because the physical conditions of the school are not great. She confessed that she did not want her really good clothes to be “destroyed by the job.” She came to teaching through the Teaching Fellows program and did not expect to last as a long as she did. She was considering becoming an administrator or

changing careers during the time she participated in the study. She considers herself politically liberal.

### **Trochee High School Participants**

#### *Dee*

Dee is a single, 32-year-old with 6 years experience as a Social Studies teacher. A Teaching Fellow, she is a self-described “Texan conservative” who is passionate about politics. Aware that her political views are not shared by her colleagues, she admitted to enjoying sometimes provoking her colleagues at faculty meetings by voicing her unpopular “conservative statements.” She wears a conservative style and informed me that she would never think of wearing blue jeans or in any style that can be interpreted as sloppy. Her manner is usually very serious except when taking delight in making provocative statements. She identifies herself as politically conservative.

#### *Rhoda*

At 51, Rhoda is an Italian/ German-American veteran teacher with 22 years of experience teaching English, humanities, and drama. Originally from upstate New York, Rhoda came to New York City to go to NYU and become an actress. She is a self-described “free-spirit” who – judging from the warm and friendly behavior of the many students who stopped her in the hallway as we walked through it – a well-beloved teacher. In addition to her teaching responsibilities, Rhoda also runs one the school’s two after-school drama clubs. Slim and wiry, on the day we met she was sporting a hot pink streak of hair that periodically poked out from her otherwise graying medium-

length black hair style. She generally wears a casual style of blue jeans, a plain blouse or sweater, and some piece of jewelry from her many travels. She describes herself as “a life-long liberal.”

*Lee*

Lee is a married 40-year-old African-American male Social Studies teacher who has been teaching 7 years. A graduate of Queens College, he began his career working in sales but became frustrated and decided to go into teaching. A native of Queens, Lee spends his weekends doing volunteer work through the mosque he belongs to. A self-described Muslim, Lee admitted to be struggling with finding a balance his own personal beliefs and what he teaches. His own business dress style is directed towards setting a positive example for the students he teaches. He considers himself politically liberal.

As should be evident from the above descriptions, the participants represent a fairly broad spectrum of experiences, ages, backgrounds and interests. As will be seen in the following chapter, the heterogeneity of the sample provided interesting data for the study in terms of their teacher role perceptions and how these influenced their dress choices.

## Chapter 5

### FINDINGS: CLOSET TREASURES

#### Introduction

Over the course of the study all of the of the teachers, including the researcher, had a rare opportunity to gain insight into our pedagogical practices and beliefs by reflecting upon one of the most mundane daily activities which we engage – getting dressed for work. In fact, for most of the participants the study’s line of inquiry also lead to further questioning of the role of dress and appearance in their lives period.

Over the many months in which narratives were collected, the researcher found herself sharing her own narrative with the participants. Recognizing the potential of her own teacher narrative in influencing responses and her interpretation of the data, researcher’s teacher narrative is offered here, followed by participants’ discourses. It hoped that the researcher’s narrative will contribute additional insight into study, as well as reveal her orientation to teacher dress as teacher-investigator into this topic.

#### Teacher-Researcher Narrative

My interest in this topic was initially born of my own experiences as a teacher fourteen years ago. When I started my career a New York City public high school teacher in 1992, there were many tasks that I was trained for and prepared to do: teaching, preparing lessons, writing curriculum, consulting with parents, running extracurricular activities, etc. I was therefore startled when my students began asking

me questions about my “personal life.” These occasionally included inquiries about the music I listened to, my drug use and sex life, but most frequently targeted how I was dressed or groomed. Below are just a few examples of the comments that both male and female students have made about my past and current appearance in the classroom:

- “Ms. Brownstein, your afro is interfering with my education.”
- “When you go to work for the superintendent next year, can you still wear your pink platform shoes?”
- “Are those tight jeans about keeping stuff in or keeping stuff out?”

I have enjoyed amicable and relaxed relationships with most of my students, which is why I think many felt comfortable in sharing their thoughts with me about my appearance. In some cases, I regarded their inquiries as “teachable moments” that permitted an opportunity to reflect upon and discuss the role of self-presentation in daily life. Most of the time the students’ questions/remarks amused me; sometimes they made me feel uncomfortable. After all, as numerous scholars have pointed, discussions about dress and clothing can be socially uncomfortable because of the proximity of clothing to the human body. (Featherstone 2001, et alia) Suppressing my discomfort, I tried to respond as honestly as I could without transgressing the elusive boundary between appropriate and inappropriate student-teacher interaction. Many times, their interest in my appearance led to lively discussions about the different ways people dress and the possible meanings of individual dress choices, which I believe stimulated their thinking in creative and abstract ways. However, at the time I had little idea of what effect my appearance or my conversations about it with students may have had upon

the conclusions they drew about me, teachers in general, or what the teaching profession is all about. I suspect, however, that these conversations provoked their thinking in some way about the relationship between how people dress and the role(s) they occupy, which I hope has helped them gain better understanding of how dress and appearance can be used to construct one's professional and public personae.

Since my own high schools days when I fashioned a brown woolen camp blanket into a cape, I have sometimes manipulated my appearance to challenge what might be called the accepted standards of public dress. When I got my first teaching job, however, I decided I needed to "look like a teacher" which for me meant costuming myself in the "neutral" garb of my Northeastern prep-school upbringing: pearls, sweater sets and skirts – what I had been explicitly taught by my mother would be an appropriate ladylike (read "chaste" and "elite") teacher look. However, after two weeks of working in a New York City public school I just couldn't keep it up. I felt out of place in relationship to how my colleagues were dressed and the relaxed school environment. Admittedly, when I resumed my habitual dress practices I was a little startled when students started asking me about or commenting on my appearance. While how teachers should look was never explicitly a topic of my teacher training, I realize now that at the outset of my career I somehow came to believe that teachers are supposed to be sexually-neutral, somewhat bland and "bodiless" entities in the classroom. Our job was to teach, not be human beings that are gendered, classed, or decorated in any noticeable way. In other words, I had somehow come to believe that teachers should be *invisible* to students. Working with blunt, opinionate and inquisitive teenagers on a

daily basis quickly disabused me of the notion that I could achieve physical “neutrality”, and I soon became highly conscious of the fact that in addition to the lessons I was teaching, my students were experiencing me as *visceral being*. I simply could not hide the physical aspect of my presence from them. Moreover, I began to wonder why I should.

I cannot overstate the significance that this realization about my assumptions about how teachers should look had upon my daily teaching practice and thinking about schools as spaces where students are socialized. In fact, despite my initial interest in curriculum and instruction, over the course of my career I became much more interested in the potential educative power of what might best be described as the subtexts of schools – the unofficial and unscripted material “texts” of the school environment, such as the physical layout and smells of the school building and its rooms, how different school personnel dressed and interacted with one another and the students, what teachers and students ate for lunch, etc.

As part of this interest, I began to seriously reflect upon the effect of my corporality (i.e., dress, smell, grooming, gestures, voice, etc.) upon my students. Did how I dress enhance, detract or have no effect upon the lessons I was trying to teach? What conclusions were students drawing about my teaching ability and/or character based on how I arranged my body and grooming? Should I be dressing, gesticulating and positioning my body in relationship to my students in ways that socializes them, say, for the corporate world? What “messages” did I convey to (or conceal from) students via my physical appearance? Should how I present myself physically play a role in my teaching, and if so, what role should that be? If there is a teacher “look”, how

did it develop and what does it mean in terms of defining who we are as teachers and the teaching profession? Finally, to what extent – if at all – does teachers’ physical presentation matter in educating students and the teaching profession in general?

While working on this study I returned to the NYCDOE as a middle school teacher. No longer just a scholar investigating a topic, I now occupy the positions both of the investigator and the investigated, a situation that has broadened and deepened my analysis and interpretation of data collected from teachers. Quite unexpectedly, my greatest insights into the educational justifications for regulating teacher dress have resulted from working in two schools, the first with a dress code for teachers and the second without.

Both schools serve similar populations: 40% of the students are identified as special education students; over 90% are identified as living in poverty; and both are located in large impoverished neighborhoods in Manhattan. Additionally, both schools were created within the past five years and lead by principals, both of Dominican descent, each with fewer than two years’ experience in their roles. The only significant difference between the schools is the principals’ ages: One is 28 years old and the other 46. Considering how similar the schools are, I began to wonder how it is that two schools that serve similar populations could have such differing ideas about how teachers should dress for work. What is it, I wondered, that makes one school firmly believe in a dress code for teachers while the other firmly does not? How do these principals conceive of the role of teacher dress in helping students succeed? Ultimately, it was the data that I collected for this study that have enabled me to draw conclusions

not only about the differences between how these principals may regard teacher dress in relationship to teacher professionalism, but also about how teachers enact constructions of how a professional teacher should look.

Another benefit of returning to the classroom is that it has vividly renewed my awareness of the sensory bombardment that is daily existence for a classroom teacher, a phenomenon that appears to be especially intense in the middle schools and even more so in one as dilapidated as the one in which I worked the first year of my return. It also reminds me of the physical hardships of teaching in a New York City public school. The two schools in which I worked, like so many others, have fallen into great disrepair due to age, multiple incomplete conversions and general wear. The physical considerations of the environment had a huge influence the kinds of clothes I have purchased and worn for work.

As stated earlier, my initial interest in this topic grew out of my experiences as a teacher during a career that began seventeen years ago. In thinking about teacher dress and how my own dress practices have change I am forced to consider age. At forty-six, I am one of perhaps seven teachers in their forties or older out of about forty-three staff members of the two schools where I have worked combined. This leads me to think that middle school teachers do not physically survive to their forties, have gone on to administration or high schools (as I did earlier in my career) or have left the profession. I mention this because I have noted the differences in dress between myself and my younger colleagues, who by observed dress practices demonstrate less concern about concealing the contours of their bodies and skin than I do. To state this differently, I am

more concerned about “hiding” my body from my students now as a teacher than I ever did as a high school teacher ten years ago. I am not sure of the extent to which my current dress practices are affected by maturity, changes in my body, the age-group I teach, or changes in thinking as a result of my research. Once again, I mention all these considerations because they have greatly influenced the analysis of the data.

### **Introduction to Teacher Narratives and Discussion**

Analyzing the data and arriving at findings was by far the most challenging and intellectually rigorous activity involved in completing this study. While many efforts have been made to do so, it simply is not possible to completely capture the full richness and depth of participant responses in a paper of this length. Nonetheless, the researcher has endeavored to present the most significant findings as thoroughly and cogently as possible.

Key findings are organized by research question. For each question, responses were grouped into theme areas. These will be introduced and illustrated with excerpts from exemplary teacher discourses. Each discourse will be followed by a brief commentary. Upon concluding each question section, key findings will be summarized and commented upon as a whole before addressing responses to a different research question.

### **DRESS AS REPRESENTATION AND CONTRADICTION**

This section will discuss the findings of teacher responses to Question 1 of the study. This question asked participants to respond to the following: Describe your teaching style. Is there a relationship between your dress style and your teaching style?

A key finding of this research question is that teachers in employ dress as both to represent and contradict their teaching styles. The majority of teachers being studied (six of the nine) reported that their choice of dress was an extension of or represented their teaching styles. For these teachers, dress serves as an expression of personal beliefs, personality, physical being or a combination of two or more of these. In this sense, dress style is an outward manifestation of the teacher's teaching style. By contrast, for the remaining four teachers choice of dress served to contradict rather than represent the teacher's teaching style. The two principal reasons for using dress this were either to conceal the teacher's "self" or to validate the teacher's teaching style. In the latter, dress served to "legitimize" the teacher's self-proclaimed "non-traditional" or "wacky" approach to teaching.

The six excerpts below illustrate the theme areas of dress as representation or contraction of teaching style.

## DISCOURSES OF REPRESENTATION

### *"I not only teach the arts, I live it, too"*

**Rhoda:** *I consider myself pretty innovative when it comes to infusing the arts into the curriculum. I'm not required to, but it's just a big part of my personal interests and something that I know that kids can benefit from. Part of dressing the way that I do is to show that I not only teach about the arts, I live it, too.*

In discussing her dress choices with her, Rhoda expressed that she knew that her dress style interested her students. At a certain moment early in her career she began to

realize that dressing in an “artsy” way would be way to help her students to understanding that they way one lives one’s life could be art. At one point in our conversation, she went on to say that, “my jewelry in particular is part of their curriculum.” When asked about what she would do if she were informed she had to teach without using her dress as part of the curriculum, she responded, “Well, of course I would go on teaching. And I’d have to think of another way to help students realize that daily life could be artistic expression.” From her comments, it is reasonable to infer that Rhoda believed that through dress she could enact her principal belief in life and as a teacher: Art can be a lived experience. In this way, Rhoda’s choice of clothing became an extension of beliefs and her life.

*“I dress the way I teach”*

**Bill:** *I dress the way I teach – with a lot of order and discipline. Pretty conservative, but that’s really how I am now both in and out of the classroom. I wasn’t always, but now I see that it’s a lot better to dress professionally for the classroom.*

Similar to Rhoda, Bill’s commentary about his clothes indicate that his manner of dress is a physical expression not only about his teaching style, but also about his personality and being. Bills comments reveal that he equates his conservative style of dress with being professional. He also associates “conservative” dress with order and discipline.

Bill’s remarks reveal familiar tropes in discussions about dress. What makes these comments particularly interesting is that in light of Bill’s having informed the

researcher that he did not always dress as he does now. This suggests that he might not have been disciplined or “ordered” as a teacher before he changed his style of dress. Additionally, his remarks also suggest that it might have just taken his conscious decision to change his dress style to have made him conservative “both in and out of the classroom.” The exact meaning of these statements is not known as it was not pursued further by the researcher. They do demonstrate, however, that teachers such as Bill equate conservative appearance with order and discipline.

*“The clothes must let me teach.”*

**Annie:** *I need to dress in a way that lets me move, so my clothes must let me teach. My teaching is really energetic, free-spirited, with lots of movement, jumping up and down. I dress in way that lets me do that comfortably so of course I’m going to wear a lot of sneakers, jeans and stuff.*

Unlike Bill and Rhoda’s reflections about dress in relationship to teaching style, Annie’s comments indicate that her clothes must be as flexible and strong as she is in the classroom. Rather than being an expression of her curriculum or instruction, her clothes are an extension of her physical body. When asked further about the symbolic meaning of her clothes for her teaching style, Annie responded, “They’re just plain clothes. I buy them because they move well and are practical. That’s all.” Over the course of the interview process, however, the researcher discovered that there was much more to Annie’s dress choices than just their ability to move along with her movements.

*“My lessons are very ordered and very predictable... like my teaching style.”*

**Dee:** *A few of my colleagues that I’m a Texas teacher cliché. I’m pretty sure that’s supposed to be some kind of criticism of my being so traditional...I dress in a conservative professional manner, and as unpopular as it is at this school, my students are in rows with assigned seats. So sue me if what I’m doing actually works for these kids! ...I’d say that for sure my dress style is an indication of my teaching style. My lessons are very ordered and with very predictable... I definitely look like my teaching style.*

Dee’s discourses reveal that she conceives as her dress style as a complement to her traditional instructional practices. She equates the ordered rows that her students sit in to her “ordered” lessons and, by extension, appearance, claiming that she “looks like” her teaching style. Unfortunately, the researcher was unable to question any of the colleagues at Dee’s school about Dee’s being a “Texas cliché.” When asked to explain the meaning of what the phrase meant, Dee offered, “Probably that I’m as conservative as George W. Bush! And I’m gonna kick your ass Texas style!” Judging from the pleasure that she seemed to take in sharing this self-description with the researcher, it is apparent that Dee’s ordered, predictable and ultimately conservative dress style is an integral part of her conservative teacher self, one that by implication takes a modicum of pleasure in correcting uppity behaviors.

*“In some ways, I use my dress style to subdue students.”*

**Danielle:** *This isn’t too complimentary towards myself, but it’s sort of where I am with my career right now. My lessons are kind of boring, and so is my dress style. How I know this is last year one of my 9<sup>th</sup> graders got really mad at me and yelled, “You dress as boring as you*

*teach!" In some ways, I use my dress style to subdue students. I don't want them to think about me as a person. I just want them to take what I'm trying to teach them seriously.*

In interviewing Danielle, she revealed that she was having somewhat of a crisis as a teacher. She was insecure about her instructional style and felt that after six years of teaching she still struggled with classroom management. She shared that as a result she was experimenting with different room arrangements and toning down her dress as much as possible to create a classroom environment that would not "set off" her students. When asked where she got the idea to employ these strategies, she said told me they were based upon her experiences as a student in the suburban high school she had gone to.

Among Danielle's many thought-provoking discourses is the notion that dress style can "subdue" students. From this statement, it is possible to infer that Danielle believes that dress as the power of influencing student behavior one way or the other. This is not a discourse that often hears in discussions about classroom management. For Danielle, it is unclear whether her "boring" dress style is a reflection of her teaching style or vice versa. It does seem, however, that they work together as a part of a strategy to manage the behavior and learning of her students.

***"How I dress is definitely part of the teaching agenda."***

**Tonya:** *How I dress is definitely part of the teaching agenda. I mean, my kids are used to all the "dashiki stuff" – that's what some of them call my clothes. We don't talk about it every day...They know that I'm a radical, and I think they find that interesting. I don't preach it in the*

*classroom, but the fact that they can see it, see it in my clothes, well, they know that it's always there, just like my skin color.*

Tonya's ethnic dress style is an expression of her political beliefs. During her interview, she disclosed that she wanted to "wake up" her students' consciousness, and that she did that on a variety of levels. One of the ways that she does so is through her assessment practices in which students ultimately give themselves their own final official grades. Another way that she challenges students' notion of education is by having each student teach a class. On a daily, lived level, she wears a variety of West African clothing that not only accentuate her height, but also highlight what she has identified as her "non-belief" in the West. And, as she informed the researcher on in passing several times during the research, engaging student interest in examining the world through a variety of racial and ethnic lenses is a fundamental aim of her instruction. It is safe to assert, therefore, that in Tonya's case choice of dress is very much a reflection her teaching style.

How Tonya's students respond to her dress and teaching style is unclear to the researcher. What is interesting is Tonya's perception that students can "see" her political beliefs in the fabric of her clothing, and like a person's skin color, the fabric of her clothes are imbued with social, ethnic, cultural and racial meanings.

## **DISCOURSES OF CONTRADICTION**

### *"There's More to Me than Meets the Eye"*

**Russ:** *I want to be sure that my students understand that I am a strict, traditional, conventional and conservative teacher which is why I always wear a jacket and never jeans. In some ways, I am*

*those things... I consider myself a very liberal and innovative teacher...My teaching style is pretty improvisational and unconventional, I think, at least, more than most...My assessment methods are pretty traditional, though. I guess you could say that there's more to me than meets the eye.*

When he was questioned further, Russ revealed that when he first started as a teacher, dressing in a jacket and tie gave him more confidence to manage his classes. Later on, his conservative style dress helped him to “ease into coming out” to his colleagues and eventually to his students. By the researcher’s informal observations of Russ’ teaching, he is indeed a highly animated and humorous teacher, a side of his personality that stands in sharp contrast to his reserved manner in dress and speech outside of the classroom. When asked if he would consider changing his style of dress, he responded, “I think I would feel insecure. Besides what I’m doing seems to be working with the kids.”

It became evident in speaking with Russ that his style of dress served both as a social security blanket and as a management tool. Despite his demonstrated “unconventional” teaching style, Russ uses dress not only to manage his students, but also his impression to others. Outwardly conventional by appearance, inwardly there is much more to Russ than meets the eye. In the follow-up interview, he revealed to me, “Sometimes I still get hung up with that *oh my God, I’m acting so gay!* paranoia. I have to remind myself that most people don’t really care, especially my students and definitely not in this school. I have no idea if I’m coming off gay in the classroom, but dressing straight definitely makes me feel more secure.” In Russ’ case, his conservative style –

that is, dressing straight – cloaks the insecurities he still obviously feels about his sexual orientation, and by extension, his unconventional teaching practice.

*“I get away with the stuff that I do because I’m dressed the way I dress.”*

**Mike:** *I want to be taken seriously by my students, which is why I make a point of the jacket and tie... these things help make me look formal...Actually wearing a jacket and a tie really isn’t a big deal since I’ve had to do it since I was a kid...My teaching style isn’t conservative or strict as the one I was used to at school...my teaching style is a little on the wacky side... I think I get away with the stuff that I do in the classroom because I’m dressed the way I’m dressed.*

Similar to Russ, Mike’s outward conservative appearance does not betray his bouncy, highly animated, theatrical teaching style in the classroom. Highly conscious of his relatively short stature, throughout the study Mike repeated that the most important factor in his dress choice for work was his need to be taken seriously. He informed me that he had always been a class clown all the way through college, and that he continues to be one now as a teacher. He did not, however, want to be taken as a kind of jester by his colleagues and students. If anything, he said, “I think people have come to have a kind of respect for me not only because my teaching is solid, but also because I seem like a serious, honest guy. I’m not sure that would happen without the clothes. A lot of people who come to see my class make comments about my goofiness. I think they might have a different feeling about my teaching style if I weren’t wearing a jacket and tie.” In Mike’s case, the conservative look he wears is not only a cloak for how he feels about his stature, but also about his unorthodox teaching style.

*“Dressing in a traditional serious way my non-traditional approach to teaching more acceptable.”*

**Lee:** *I consider myself a very disciplined and strict teacher...I am teaching Social Studies from a very non-traditional standpoint...I am trying to get my students to challenge how histories are created and taught. Some may call what I am doing anti-establishment, I don't know. I believe it is the right thing. I dress in a conservative style because I want my students to understand the power of dressing in a traditional, serious way. It makes my non-traditional approach to teaching more acceptable.*

Lee's choice of clothing is crisply pressed shirts, subdued ties and tailored suits. His demeanor is warm and commands respect. Over the course of the study it became obvious that his students hold him in high regard and with a certain amount of awe. Needless to say, students who were observed with less than ideal behaviors in other classes were models of sincerely attention in his. His approach to history, however, requires students to thoughtfully reflect upon the nature of truth and perspective in history, something that is not always addressed in depth or at length in the New York City public high schools. When asked about the apparent contradiction between his teaching style and appearance, he replied, "I was raised in a strict Christian household in Mississippi. At home we were taught that if you were going to disagree with everyone about something, you might as well do it as politely as possible. I'm trying to politely disagree with how children are taught history. Looking respectable helps, especially as a black man."

Clearly Lee has made a decision to use "respectable" dress to conceal is unorthodox curriculum choices. In this regard, his use of dress is similar to that of Russ

and Mike in that traditional dress is a means of concealing non-traditional teaching styles.

### *Summary of Findings for Discourses of Representation and Contradiction*

The above teachers' discourses reveal that there are teachers who use dress to extend and/or embody their teacher selves and others who use dress to conceal or validate their teacher selves. As stated at the outset, in the sample studied the majority of teachers belonged to group that used dress to represent their teacher selves.

Two features of these discourses are worthy to note. First, all of the teachers employed and juxtaposed the terms *liberal* and *conservative*, as well as terms related to these, with high frequency throughout their responses. Following the conservative-liberal dichotomy, terms such as "serious," "strict," and "traditional" the conceptual opposites of terms such as "unconventional," "innovative" and "non-traditional." This is not an altogether unfamiliar trope in the researcher's investigation of teacher dress (see above discussion of media articles of teacher dress.) As will be seen later, the tensions within the conservative-liberal dichotomy are central to understanding teacher conceptualizations of dressing for work.

Second, it is interesting that teachers use "traditional" dress as means of masking "non-traditional" curriculum and instruction. Teachers who conceptualize dress this way so either to "protect" themselves as teachers or to validate their instructional choices. The researcher did not pursue the reasons for the teachers' implied insecurities.

Instead, the researcher inferred that an underlying belief of the teachers is that when taking instructional risks, it is important to look as socially appropriate as possible.

It should be noted that during both her own teaching experience and the study, the researcher has not encountered the inverse usage of dress that is, employing a liberal dress style to conceal a conservative teaching style. It is hard to imagine that a very traditional New York City public high school teacher would need to conceal her teaching style with a “wacky” dress style. Although unable to support it with empirical evidence, the researcher’s experience has been that high school teachers generally are more self-conscious or apologetic of being “wacky” than they are being strict, although clearly much of this depends upon both the school culture and era in which one is teaching.

As will be discussed in the following section, the tension between the liberal and conservative teacher is articulated much more clearly in questioning teachers about how their students perceive them as a result of their dress practices.

### **CONSTRUCTIONS OF THE CONSERVATIVE AND LIBERAL TEACHER IMAGES THROUGH DRESS PRACTICES**

This section will discuss the findings of teacher responses to Question 2 of the study. This question asked participants the following: Do you think that your students have an opinion about you as a teacher based upon how you are dressed? What do you think they think?

The key finding revealed by responses to this question is that teachers' believe they are conceived of by their students as being either conservative or liberal teachers based on how they are dress for work. Additional, responses to this question reveal teacher elaborations of what it means to be either conservative or liberal.

To better understand the findings of the liberal-conservative teacher discourses in Question 2, it is important to recall the participants' self-identifications of dress style for work. Of the nine participants, six teachers self-identified as wearing either "conservative" (Mike, Russ, Dee, Danielle) or "business" (Bill, Lee) styles of dress. The other three participants self-identified as having "ethnic" (Tonya) or "casual" (Annie, Rhoda) styles of dress.

Whereas in Question 1 it was interesting to see how teachers variously used dress as representation or contradictions of teaching style, Question 2 requires teachers to reflect upon the impression that students may have about them based upon their outward constructed appearance. The central difference between Questions 1 and 2 is that in the first, teachers needed to reflect upon their dress choices and their teacher selves. In the second, teachers were asked to reflect upon what their students believe their teacher selves to be based upon their dress choices. Essentially, the difference between the questions is that one requires teachers to think about the relationship how they look and who they are and the second about how they look and who their students think they are.

One of the more unexpected and interesting features of the group of teachers studied is that twice as many teachers dressed in a conservative/business style than

those who dressed in a liberal style. It is unclear why the more “conservative” look should be in favor for the sample group. Although it may be for many intriguing reasons, investigating the reasons for this tendency in the sample group falls outside the scope of the study.

Because six of the nine participants dressed in a conservative/business style, obviously there were twice as many discourses that elaborated upon what a conservative teacher looks like than there were for the liberal teacher. In analyzing the transcripts of teacher interviews it became remarkably clear that teachers constructed conservative and liberal teacher selves through dress that were heavily driven by the impressions they hoped their students would form about them based upon their outward. The six excerpts below illustrate the theme areas of dress was employed by teachers to construct either a conservative or liberal teacher self.

## CONSERVATIVE TEACHER DISCOURSES

### *“Don’t Mess Around with Him”*

**Lee:** *I look serious to students...when they first meet me they know not to try to play with me. Some do, anyway, and they learn quickly what will happen. I do not usually have to correct any one student’s behavior more than one or two times. Just by looking at me, they know I am strict...my expectations are high. I take my work seriously...professionally. I’m sure there are some (students) who tell their friends, “Don’t mess around with him!”*

Central to Lee’s discourses about his dress is the sense of fear and respect that it creates. It is apparent that he wants to establish a boundary between himself and his

students not only in terms of appearance, but also in behavior: He does not “play” and he does not want to be “messed with.” It is interesting to note that Lee’s self-described political orientation is “liberal” while his self-described dress style is “business.” Clearly, being a “liberal” does not necessarily mean that a teacher will wear a less professional, conservative style. In this regard the contrast between Lee’s dress style and political orientation is a contradiction of the majority of articles about teacher dress that conflate “liberal” with “jeans.”

#### *“How I Dress Helps to Set the Tone”*

**Dee:** *When I decided to become a teacher, I knew the kind of teacher that I wanted to be and I had an idea about how I should look...of course I should look professional. I want my students to achieve at a high level, and how I dress helps to set the tone of my expectations of their work and behavior...Whether we want to be or not, we are role models for our students. From my appearance, I think students know what to expect from me: seriousness, reliability, non-nonsense teaching that is rigorous, strict... I try to live up to those qualities.*

Dee’s discourses are strikingly similar to Lee’s. First, she equates her look with being “professional” and eliciting “a high level” of performance from her students. Moreover, she believes her clothes communicate how strict and rigorous she is as a teacher. While her discourses do not indicate that she wants her students to fear her, she has a clear understanding that a major part of her being a teacher is to serve as a role model, a model that has high and “serious” standards that she endeavors to live up to.

In discussing her comments with her, Dee indicated that she often struggles with meeting the high standards she has placed on herself. Over the time period we worked

together, she admitted to me that she was finding it increasingly difficult to be “the conservative one” where she was working. When the researcher asked if her dress style were changing as a result, she responded, “No, I still dress as I always did: I just believe in the effect that it has less on the kids.” Unfortunately, there was not enough time to discuss the matter further. It is clear, though, that whatever was challenging Dee enough to complain about being the “conservative one,” it was not enough to materialize into a change of dress that could alter whatever perception her students had of her.

*“The way he dresses is really Old School.”*

**Bill:** *Some of my students say I look preppy. Actually, it’s true because I buy some of my clothes from J. Crew and Brooks Brothers, which are pretty preppy places... The clothes are conservative in style but not boring, just classic, which is probably dull to kids. I want them to feel comfortable in approaching me, but conscious of the differences between students and teachers. If they have opinions about me based on my clothes, they’d probably be like, “The way he dresses is really Old School.”*

Most of Bill’s discourses about clothing focus upon his choice of creating a conservative teacher identity, one that ultimately helps him to build legitimacy as an administrator. He noted that his students appear to “take (him) more seriously” as a teacher now that he is dressing in a more traditional style, and also admitted that he feels differently about himself now as a teacher now that he has chosen to dress better. Ultimately, however, his weaker students still struggle in his classes, although he claims that now when students who might not be doing what they are supposed to be doing in the hallways almost always stop or scatter “they see the suit and tie coming down the

hall.” By inference, it is evident that Bill’s preppy look may have the effect of making him seem like an school authority to be wary of.

*“I try to dress to impress my students”*

**Mike:** *I think my dress style is pretty neutral. Well, not neutral exactly. I look like I’m a professional and take teaching seriously. I dress to be taken seriously. I want students to feel that I’m in charge, that I’m an authority. I try to dress to impress my students, not with wealth, but with my authority in the classroom.*

Mike’s self-described “pretty neutral” style of dress consisted of a jacket and tie. When asked about what made his choice of dress “neutral,” he remarked, “Well, it I think students understand that a jacket and tie means that you are a serious person, and that there is no other agenda than that.” It is likely that Mike might have thought that some of his colleagues’ dress choice reflected some kind of “agenda.” His choices, however, were more a reflection of his often-articulated desire to be taken seriously as a short man. By extension, one can infer that in Mike’s conception a more conservative look makes one appear taller, as though one can appear greater than oneself when conservatively dressed.

*“I’m not here to play”*

**Danielle:** *Ever since I started teaching I have tried to dress in a way that did not call attention myself. At first it was because I was young and I was trying to look more mature and professional. Now, it’s mostly because it’s a habit and honestly I’m think I’m more reserved than a lot of the teachers... I know my students think I don’t dress well, that is, I dress in a way that is really boring. But I also think they take me more seriously as a teacher because of it... I expect a*

*lot of them. If anything, I think how I dress tells them that I'm not here to play and be their friend, I'm here to help them grow into thoughtful, serious adults.*

Danielle's discourses echo several of the features of Lee's and Dee's. Like the other two, she hopes that her clothing conveys to students her seriousness of purpose, her professionalism and her lack of wanting to play or be friends with her students. Like Lee and Dee, she sees herself first and foremost "apart" from her students. Most importantly, she also associates her dress style with her high expectations from her students, something that is also revealed in Lee and Dee's discourses.

What is interesting, however, is that Danielle recognizes that her demeanor is more reserved than her colleagues, something that is reflected in her choice of dress. Additionally, her choice of dress of has become "habit", something that indicates that she does not view dress as playing a particularly strong role in her instruction. If anything, she uses dress to erase her "self" from her teacher self, so that she students merely view her as a teacher without a real human side.

***"You just don't look gay."***

**Russ:** *I think my students take me as just a regular, traditional guy, conservative, even...Some of my students enter my classes knowing nothing about me. Others do. I don't exactly wear being gay on my sleeve...gay guys wear all kinds of clothes. I try to set a very serious, strict tone in the classroom, and I think my jacket and tie conveys that seriousness to students...One time I had I had a student who said, "You just don't look gay." At the time I laughed. He obviously had some other kind of image in his head than the one I'm putting out there.*

While not overtly evident from the above discourse alone, many of Russ' statements about his style of dress address his appearance or non-appearance as a gay man. While he does mention that he does not display his sexual orientation through dress in the above, it is evident that dress choice as a manifestation of orientation is something that he thinks about. Gay or straight, in this study it should be clear that there are several teachers who associate their style of dress with their desire to be taken seriously or as "traditional" or "conservative" teachers. For Russ, however, a conservative style of dress appears either to conceal his gender. While many of his students may know he is gay, he dresses in a style that does not lead them to think so. In other words, conservative dress can be equated with straight dress.

The possibilities presented by Russ' discourses suggest that further study into how non-heterosexual teachers dress for work could lead to uncovering some interesting insights. Unfortunately, the scope of this study did not enable the researcher to go into greater depth. For the present, it will suffice to say that Russ' choice of conservative dress was grounded in concerns beyond just being taken seriously as a teacher at his school.

## LIBERAL TEACHER DISCOURSES

### *"I Dress in a Way that Looks like the Kids"*

**Annie:** *When kids see me, they know I am a fun, friendly, lively teacher. Even kids who don't take my class say hi to me in the hall because I look friendly. ...by the time students actually they have me as a teacher.... they have an idea of who I am, that I'm open-minded and expressive... I know I dress in a way that looks like the kids. Part of the reason I do that is to look approachable,*

*but the other part is that it is simply more comfortable... I don't look as conservative or "professional" as some of the other teachers, but ... they do well because they like me and want to please me.*

The impression that Annie hopes to convey through her style of dress upon her students contrasts sharply with those of the teachers discussed above. For Annie, comfort is paramount, but also the need to be perceived as approachable and friendly. Unlike the conservative teachers, she wants to dissolve the invisible social wall between teachers and students because, among other things, she believes her students "do well because they want to please (her)."

It is unknown to the researcher how well Annie's students performed academically in her classes. They did appear to enjoy her highly energetic, participatory and loud classes. Annie evidently has a conception of what "looking professional" is that she chooses to ignore, although she did not concretely articulate what "looking professional" looks like. By inference, Annie believes that her look is not professional, at least by what she believes are traditional standards.

*"Keeping the kids off balance with my appearance, that's a good thing."*

**Tonya:** *I scare the bejeezus out of kids before they get to know me. I'm pretty big and most of the time I'm wearing a gele<sup>3</sup> or something else unfamiliar to them. For sure they know I'm not into the usual styles of dress around here, and I think that makes them think I'm from a different country. Or that I'm a counter-cultural something. They wouldn't be all that wrong! ...I consider myself a professional, and I am challenging the status quo in a lot of ways, including my*

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<sup>3</sup> West African headscarf

*look...keeping the kids off balance with my appearance, that's a good thing because it keeps them in line and they hopefully they'll become more open-minded about people with different points of view because they had me as a teacher.*

Tonya is the only teacher in the study who self-described her dress style as “ethnic.” Her choice of wearing “ethnic” clothing serves several purposes, but central among them the need to “keep her students in line” and “educate them about difference.”

Tonya admitted to me that dress in West African clothing was a way of coping with her large size. Realizing that it would be impossible to conceal or height or girth, and realizing that is less expensive to dress in West African clothing she could pick up in the African Mart than in plus size clothes from Lane Bryant, she decided that she could use her body as a kind of “educational billboard” (her term, not mine) as part of instruction. Brooklyn-born and raised, Tonya explains often needs to explain to her students that she is not an African immigrant, at least not a recent one. In fact, she sometimes uses her style of dress to educate students about the differences between western and non-western styles of dress and the sociopolitical implications of choosing to wear one or the other.

Tonya is highly conscious of her use of clothing and the effect that it has upon her students. Her desire to keep her students mystified by her clothes helps to feel threatened by her to a certain extent. In this regard she is similar to the conservative teachers who use clothes to socially separate themselves from their students. And, also similar to the conservative teachers who wear jacket and suits, Tonya considers herself a

professional, and by extension her dress style as professional. Clearly, the liberal teacher and conservative teachers have different ways employing dress style to create the impression of “professionalism.” They simply go about it differently.

***“I’m beyond needing to look a certain way to be considered a professional.”***

**Rhoda:** *The kids think I’m open-minded, liberal, artsy even. I am artsy, so it’s okay. I dress in a way that is an extension of my instruction and personality, and the kids can easily see that...I’m older, and that in combination with the clothes and jewelry I wear makes me seem unthreatening and approachable...I’ve been teaching so long, I’m beyond needing to look a certain way to be considered a professional. Students expect me to be unusual as I teacher, and I am! At least I hope so.*

The most experienced and mature teacher of the sample, Rhoda told me that in her twenty-two years of working as a teacher in different schools and their cultures, her choice of dress has more or less remained the same. As a younger teacher she had worn even more “out-there” outfits. The most significant difference between what she used to wear and what she wears to today is simply able to afford more expensive designer “artsy” clothing and accessories.

Rhoda sees what she wears as a materialization of her artistic approach to teaching and living. Her dress style is a major part of her curriculum, something that students can easily see. Having endured multiple conversations from more conservative administrators and colleagues about the need for “professional” teacher dress, she feels confident that her dress style is professional even though it may not follow any of the ideas of what professional teacher dress may be. Like Annie, she is

more interested in being approachable and unthreatening to students. Her apparent success as a teacher, evident both from her confidence about her teacher self and longevity as a New York City public high school teacher, frees her from questioning her look as being unprofessional. Clearly dressing as she does is effective in establish the kind of tone she needs to work with her students.

### *Summary of the Conservative and Liberal Teacher*

Discourses about the opinions teachers believe their students have about them from their dress styles fall into one of two categories: Discourses about the Conservative teacher and discourses about the Liberal teacher. Teacher construction of self as conservative involves seriousness, strictness, and professionalism. Liberal teachers, by contrast, construct themselves as approachable, open-minded and professional.

Notably, the one characteristic that conservative and liberal teachers have in common is professionalism. How the teachers discuss being a professional and how it is constructed through teacher dress varies considerable. Interestingly all conservative and one liberal teachers use dress to in instill a sense of fear or inapproachability. Conservative teachers also conflate dressing conservatively with conveying the expectation of high achievement from their students. Liberal teachers, by contrast, use dress to around student interest in their selves, teacher selves or what they are teaching. Where conservative teachers use dress to convey “rigor”, liberal teacher use dress to convey “fun.”

In the next section, teachers were asked to consider and identify the single most important fact in how they dress for work. As will be seen, the findings from this section are notably different from the previous two as the conservative-liberal discourses play a secondary role in influencing teacher decisions.

### **THE EFFECT OF SCHOOL CONDITIONS AND CONCEPTS OF TEACHER SELF ON DRESS PRACTICES**

This section will discuss the findings of teacher responses to Question 3 of the study. This question asked participants the following: What is the most significant factor that has influenced how you *usually* dress for work at this school (e.g. principal's directives, what you teach, what other teachers are wearing, the student population, your own beliefs, etc.)?

Participants were asked to reflect upon the most significant factor that guides how they dress at the school where they are currently teaching. It is assumed in this question that each school has a particular school culture that plays a role to lesser and greater degrees in influencing how teachers dress for work.

Unlike the discourses to earlier questions where the analysis of data reveal a significant amount of similarity of both primary and secondary definition codes, teacher discourses to Question 3 were more diverse and varied. As such, more excerpts have been included below to illustrate the both central theme areas of teacher discussion as well as the nuances that distinguish one from the other.

Findings reveal from an analysis of responses to Question 3 that teachers identify the most significant factor in dress choice in one of two ways. The first factor is the “environment” of this school. “Environment” is being used here to designate a) the physical condition, b) the school culture, and c) the student population. The second factor is the teacher’s personal beliefs. In this case, the term “personal beliefs” is used to describe the teacher’s belief that she/he is a role model, b) the teacher’s upbringing and on experiences in school, and c) the teacher’s affective state.

## SCHOOL CONDITIONS AND TEACHER DRESS

### Physical Environment

*“The clothes could get messed up.”*

**Danielle:** *The schools that I’ve worked in have been the main reason why I dress in the clothes I dress in. I buy less expensive but durable clothes at the Gap or Old Navy because they’re appropriate... I know that the clothes could get messed up by the chairs or desks. I choose not to wear jeans because I don’t think they look professional plus I don’t think either of the principals I’ve worked for are too thrilled about them.*

Danielle’s discourses reveal several factors that contribute to her dress choices, the most significant of which is the need to wear clothes that can withstand the perils of the school’s physical environment. Her discourses also reveal other concerns including the need to be *appropriate, professional* and pleasing to the principal. In Danielle’s conceptualization, the physical environment of schools are hostile, requiring teachers to cloth themselves as appropriately, durably and inexpensively as they can.

## School Culture

*“I feel comfortable to wear the clothes I wear because of the principal.”*

**Tonya:** *In this school the principal is really supportive of diversity, both of instructional styles and the faculty... The reason I feel comfortable to wear the clothes I wear is because of the principal. Just look around and see what everyone is wearing. There’s a lot of diversity of styles because there’s a lot of different kinds of people teaching up in here! It’s a good thing for the students, I think.*

It is evident from Tonya’s discourses that her principal’s leadership, the most significant factor in her daily dress choices and, indirectly, the “diversity of styles” of her colleagues. She feels free to take both instructional and dress risks as a result of what she perceives as the support by her principal of the dress choices made by the faculty.

Tonya’s perception of her principal welcoming of “diversity” is interesting, especially in light of Bill’s discourses about his own dress choices for teaching at Anapest High School, the same school as Tonya’s.

*“I figured out what I should or should not wear by looking at other teachers...”*

**Bill:** *When I first started teaching here I figured out what I should or should not wear by looking at what other teachers are wearing...As I got to know the principal I discovered she didn’t really like teachers wearing jeans although she never “forbade” it.... My decision to wear more formal really came out of two things: Wanting to look more like the administrator that I working on becoming and wanting to follow my principal’s preference for more conservative teacher dress. Maybe I’m a sellout, but it never hurts to look more professional.*

As Bill's discourses reveal, looking like an administrator means looking more professional that is wearing the more conservative garments of a jacket and tie. As can be easily seen in almost every public school in New York City and beyond, there is a distinct difference between how teachers and administrators dress. Administrators do not wear jeans. Administrators wear jacket and ties if they are men, and dresses, skirts and sweater sets or suits if they are women. Teachers basically wear whatever they want unless they are encouraged to do otherwise.

Interestingly, when Bill first came to Anapest HS he claims to have dressed in accordance to "whatever everyone else was wearing." Particularly in consideration of Tonya's statements about the school's dress diversity, the researcher asked him to describe the school's dress style. Bill explained, "Well it's kind of hard to say. I knew I could wear jeans and a tee-shirt if I wanted to, and sometimes I did."

If we accept that what Bill says about his principal is true, Tonya may have misinterpreted the school's diversity of dress styles and principal's silence about her own choice of ethnic dress as sign that the principal believes of "anything goes" when it comes to teacher dress. While it is impossible to know the principal's complete state of mind, the principal's preference for more conservative dress for her teachers is hardly exceptional in the New York City public schools system. Bill's choice of more conservative clothing is borne out of his stated desire to look more administrator-like and to please his principal. In this regard he is similar to Danielle who also hoped to gain the favor of her principal through dress.

## DISCOURSES ABOUT PERSONAL BELIEFS

### *Dressing as a Role Model*

*“Students need to know how they need to look to be successful.”*

**Lee:** *I dress for my students. Not for the principal, not for the state, not for anyone – I dress for them... I think many of the students, especially the boys, see me as a role model... I need to look serious and professional in my work so that the students see that I take what I do seriously... they need to know how they need to look to be successful.*

Like many of his other statements, the discourses above reveal Lee’s strong conviction that his dress serves an educative purpose in the lives of his students. Lee sees himself as a role model particularly for the boys, teaching them through his appearance how to look successful. In questioning Lee further about his statements, I asked him if he *really* dresses for his students. He responded by saying, “Yes, I really do. And of course I want to make a good impression among my colleagues, particularly the ones who are so sloppily dressed. They don’t really look like teachers to me.”

From his comments about some of his colleagues, Lee evidently has an idea about how teacher should and should not look. His choice of business dress appeared a little stiff to the researcher, but more understandable in terms of his strict Southern upbringing. Be the researcher’s observation the students regard him with a great deal of respect, affection and awe. Part of this is no doubt a reaction to his deliberate discourse and sharply Socratic teaching style. In large part, however, Lee’s severe appearance and physical carriage accounts for much of their reserved behavior when in his presence.

*“Students learn from us how successful professionals dress.”*

**Dee:** *I have a very clear idea about what education should be, and what teachers should look like... Teachers are role models, plain and simple. Students notice what we wear and they learn from us how successful professionals dress. I think it’s ridiculous how some of my colleagues dress. Some of them look like the kids and I wonder how they ever teach their classes... The single most important thing that influences my dress choices are about what is best for the kids, and how to prepare them to be successful in life after school.*

Similar to Lee, Dee discourses reveal her strident beliefs about how teachers should and should not dress and the firm belief that teachers serve as role models for students. Both she and Lee construct the teacher role model as one who prepares students how to dress for successful life after school. Interestingly, both Lee and Dee construct success as success in business or one of the other “professions.”

The researcher followed up on a few of Dee’s statements, the first of which was to challenge her statement that her dress choices were based principally on “what’s for the kids.” She responded by saying, “Well, I’ve made a couple of compromises because I’m a teacher. I don’t wear professional-looking heels because I’m on my feet all day. And all the clothes I wear are comfortable.” This does not appear to be much of a compromise but a concession to the demands of being of teacher and the need for physical comfort, a need that is expressed all of her other colleagues during this study and beyond.

When questioned about her choice of business dress style as a model for her students, Dee elaborated, “I imagine that many of our students may want to become professionals. Or they may be thinking about it. Anyway, they need to know how to

dress, not just for business but in general.” From her discourses it is plausible to imagine that Dee disapproves of her students’ current style of dress and sees herself as a model for proper attire. Deeply embedded in these discourses is also her conservative viewpoint that the notion that all people living in the United States aspire to become successful business professionals.

*“...the students see me as a serious, dedicated professional teacher.”*

**Mike:** *I feel like I’m “on” from the moment I enter the subway to go to school from the moment I walk into my apartment building... Wearing jeans to work is unimaginable – I can’t imagine being able to act like a teacher in them...I dress so that the students, other teachers, parents and the administration see me as a serious, dedicated professional teacher. This isn’t only because of my size, but because I want others to know that I take teaching seriously.*

Similar to Lee and Dee, Mike has the perception that he is on display for his students not only when he is in the school building, but at any time that he is not in his apartment building. When asked about this he explained that he often ran into his students and their parents in the City, particularly in the neighborhood of the school as well as in the subway. Because of this, he feels that not only does he have to act the part of the teacher, but also that a major part of this act is how he dresses. In this regard he is a role model for what a teacher should be, not only at the school but with the general public.

Like Lee and Dee he is very concerned with being considered a professional. Additionally, he wants students and others to recognize his dedication to the profession.

It is interesting to note the extent to which he constructs being a teacher with looking like a teacher, almost as if it would be impossible to serve as a teacher without looking the part. When asked to explain further about this, he conceded that, “Most of the male teacher I had growing up wore jackets and ties. When I stop and think about what I expect teachers to look like, that’s the picture I have in my head. At least for the men.”

In Mike’s last comment above sheds some insight into how some teachers “know” how to dress: They simply mimic the dress styles that are most familiar to them. In Mike’s case, he is drawing upon the dress styles he was exposed to in his own education. As will be seen below, other teachers draw upon the dress styles of the teachers where they are working for social clues about how to dress. What all of these discourses suggestion, however, is that much of teachers’ dress styles are a reflection of the teachers’ own backgrounds and what the “dress culture” of the particular school in which the teacher works.

*“I really feel like I am putting on a kind of costume when I get ready for work.”*

**Russ:** *Dressing for work is different from dressing for me... Teaching is like acting for me, so I really feel like I am putting on a kind of costume when I get ready for work... I believe I need the conservative look in order to be the kind of madcap teacher I am in the classroom... it helps to downplay my gayness. But the main reason I need to dress up in order to get into the teacher role.*

Similar to Mike who conceived of dressing for a work as part of the performance of teaching, Russ bluntly states that in dressing he is “putting on a kind of costume” that

prepares him for his teacher role. Because he considers selection of a conservative style of dress as necessary to obfuscating his “madcap” teaching style and “gayness,” by implication the teacher persona that Russ constructs through dress is a sedate and straight one. There are multiple and complex reasons why Russ should feel compelled to attempt to mask his gender identity through dress both in the school where he works and beyond it. Unfortunately, investigating these further falls outside the scope of this paper. What is most important to note in Russ’ discourse is his “need to dress up in order to get into the teacher role.” Russ obviously regards his teacher life as separate from his “real” life. For him, teaching is an “role” that requires a “costume.” While Russ may not see himself directly a role model, he does use dress to play the teacher “role.”

### *Dressing for Self*

*“If a teacher isn’t happy in her clothes, how can she be expected to teach?”*

**Annie:** *...I dress the way I am. I’m pretty sure that my principal would prefer that I wear more traditional teacher clothes to work, like a sweater-set and a skirt. That just isn’t me, though... I need to be comfortable, and feel free in my clothes. I also think the students respond well to me because of my cool style of dress. I don’t try to be cool...I’ve always dressed this way... If a teacher isn’t happy in her clothes, how can she be expected to teach?*

Annie’s discourses reveal two fundamental beliefs which are a) students respond positively to teachers who wear “cool” dress styles and b) teachers cannot be effective in their roles unless they are “happy” in their clothes. These statements merit further analysis.

It is clear that Annie conceives of dress as playing a communicative role in instruction. Aware of her personal dress style, she uses her “coolness” to convey information about herself to her students as a “cool” person so that they accept her and *see* her as one of them. Unlike her colleagues who use clothes to construct boundaries barrier between teacher and students, clothes serve as a “bonding material” that brings her closer to her students. In this regard, clothes are not used instrumentally to instruct students about appropriate social dress, but a deliberately wielded device to bring students socially and emotionally closer. Similarly, Annie uses her dress to make herself feel happy, believing that she cannot successfully teach without first feeling content in “teacher skin.”

From these statements it is not hard to see the significant role that the social and affective dimensions play in both Annie’s life and in her instruction. This stands in sharp contrast with her colleagues who assert that the primacy of “what’s best for the kids” in their discourses about what most significantly guides their dress practices. This tension between teacher needs vs. student needs in guiding dress decisions is a familiar one in discussions about the regulation of teacher dress, which will be discussed later in this paper.

*“I dress for my own pleasure first, but always with my students in mind.”*

**Rhoda:** *How I dress for work is basically about two things: Me and the students. ...After all these years, I think I have a certain sense of style that is casual, comfortable with a certain panache. I dress for my own pleasure first, but always with my students in mind. I think they can benefit from seeing how stylish a middle-aged woman can be.*

Rhoda was the only participant who discussed at length her dress choices in terms of the pleasure she derives from her clothing. Unlike Annie who asserted that in general her clothing made her feel happy, Rhoda enjoyed describing to the researcher at length the specific articles of clothing she enjoyed wearing not only because of the pleasure these gave her in wearing them, but also because of the effect that some of these articles had upon students. From these conversations it was apparent the extent that Rhoda truly does dress for her own pleasure first before all other considerations. Unsurprisingly, Rhoda admitted that she had an extensive wardrobe, and that she makes many of her dress choices on any given day based not only upon obvious factors such as the weather, but more importantly what lessons she will be teaching and her mood on a given day.

The fact that Rhoda also recognizes and admits the role of her affective state in her dress choices sets her apart from the other participants. As many teachers and non-teachers will concede, dressing to a certain extent depends not only upon what is clean and available, but also upon the kind of mood one is in on any given day. Many of the other participants mentioned that their affective states also influenced their dress choices, but none to the same extent that Rhoda did. Aware of the role of her emotions in her dress choices, it is evident that her consideration of self is the most significant factor is guiding her dress choices on a daily basis.

### *Summary of Teacher Discourses about Significant Factors in Influencing Teacher Dress*

The above discourses reveal two general factors that influence how teachers dress for work. The first of these is the how teachers responded to the conditions of the school, and the second how participants' self-constructions as teachers.

Teacher discourses about "school conditions" are divided into two condition categories: physical conditions and its social conditions. In the sample studies, only one teacher, Danielle, cited the school's physical condition as the most significant factor in influencing her dress choice. Similar to discourses found in print media articles, Danielle constructed the school environment as messy and destructive, requiring her to wear durable and in expensive clothing. While Danielle is not alone in her perception that schools are places where clothes can get damaged, she is the only one who asserted that is was the most significant factor in her dress choices. At least in terms of the sample studied, the physical environment of schools was not the most the most significant consideration in how teachers dressed for work.

Two teachers, Tonya and Bill, cited their school's social conditions, that is, school culture, as being the most significant influence in their dress choices. Although they teach in the same school, their discourses about the influence of the school culture upon their choices were different. Tonya attributed her principal's acceptance of her ethnic dress style as an extension of her receptiveness to a diversity of instructional styles and teaching staff. Similarly, observed the diversity of dress styles at the school and felt free to follow suit when he first started teaching there. His dress style became more

“administrator like” when he began preparing to become an administrator and upon learning that his principal favored a more conservative style of dress.

What Danielle, Bill and Tonya’s discourses demonstrate is that teachers influenced not only by the student population in their dress choices but also by the physical and social conditions of their schools. In Bill and Tonya’s discourses, how they perceive and are perceived by their administrators play a particularly significant role. Other participants also expressed that their principals had a significant influence about what they felt they could or could not “get away with.”

Although speaking with principals fell outside of the scope of research activities for this study it is important to mention the interesting role that principals have in influencing how teachers dress for work. As stated earlier, although principals cannot enforce dress standards for teachers, they may have some kind of influence upon how teachers dress. Based upon her own experiences in working in both New York public middle and high schools, the researcher has observed the principal’s articulation or non-articulation of dress expectations can have influence upon teacher dress practices. As the educational leader, the principal must interpret and mediate several forces that may inform her or his decision to try to convey a “dress standard” to teachers. These forces include pressures from higher ranking supervisory administrators, parents, community based organizations, and a host of other parties involved in the school. Additionally, the principal may have his or her own set of expectations and constructions of how teachers should dress that are as complex as those of the teachers being studied. In short, principals do have a subtle but definite influence in how teachers dress for work either

by their articulation or non-articulation of expectations of teacher dress. What is most often seen in the public high schools, however, is that principals do not articulate any dress expectations for teachers.

Of the teachers studied, twice as many expressed ideas about themselves as teachers in having the most significant influence upon their dress choices. These ideas will be referred to as *concepts of teacher self*. These concepts of teacher self translate into three kinds of dress practices: Dressing as a role model, dressing for the teacher role, and dressing for self.

The teachers who conceived of themselves as role models (Lee and Dee) implied that their students are vigilant of their dress practices. Their discourses also reveal that they are modeling dress practices necessary for professional success. While they did not elaborate upon what “professional” or “success” means within the context of the question asked, the researcher inferred by their business attire that and other responses that they were meant career and financial success in the business world.

Teachers such as Mike and Russ, however, disclosed that their dress practices help them “get into character” to be a teacher. While other of their discourses reveal that they conceptualize of their dress practices in a variety of ways, the most significant factor in dressing for work is being able to create a teacher “persona.” Dress in this view enables the teacher in enacting their role in the school community, and in Mike’s case, even beyond. Viewing the role of dress this way suggests that Russ and Mike’s clothing are part of their teaching “uniform” without which they would be unable to perform their professional responsibilities.

For both Annie and Rhoda, personal style plays an important affective role in their dress choice practices for school. For Annie, her choice of dress style enables her to become socially and emotionally closer to her students, employing her “cool” personal style to gain the approbation of her students. Moreover, she believes teachers need to feel “happy” in their clothes in order to be instructionally affective. By implication, her happiness a very significant factor in her style of dress.

Rhoda, by contrast, directly asserts the importance of the pleasure that she takes in clothing in her choice of dress for work. While affirming this and use of dress as an extension of her instructions, she clearly acknowledges the significant role that her affective state has affecting her choice of dress on any given day. Except for Annie, who stated that teachers need to feel “happy” in their clothes, Rhoda is the only one of the participants who openly acknowledged how strong a role that her moods played in dressing.

The researcher suspects that other participants’ affective states might also have an influence upon their daily dress practices, but were not acknowledged as having a significant role either because of the participants’ unawareness of or embarrassment in admitting them. As scholars of fashion and clothing have asserted, having feelings or beliefs about one’s clothing has been viewed as frivolous behavior. (Calefato 2005; Davis 1992; Featherstone 2001)

From the above discourses, it should be clear that there are many “most significant factors” that guide teacher dress choice decisions. Many of what teachers identify as significant influences upon their dress choices are reiterations of the

arguments opposing and supporting the regulation of teacher dress found in the researcher's analysis of print media. What is also clear is that there is no single factor that influences teachers' choice of dress. Rather, many teachers appear to be multiple influences acting upon dress choices. These include, the school environment, concepts of teacher self, and personal consideration such as mood and the teachers they has known from their own education. In the end, however, teachers' choice of dress is a material enactment of their constructions of what a "professional teacher" is. This is investigated in the next section of this chapter.

### **DRESS AND PROFESSIONALISM**

This section will discuss the findings of teacher responses to Question 4 of the study. This question asked participants the following: Educators and policy-makers often talk about "professionalism" in relationship to how teachers dress. Define "professionalism" and describe your feelings and attitudes about "professionalism" in relationship to your own dress style.

The question's objective was to learn how teachers construct "teacher professionalism" and how they may or may not enact their own professionalism through dress. Two theme areas emerged from their discourses: Those who did not view their dress practices as involved with their teacher professionalism, those who did. As such, findings have been organized into two sections entitled "What's dress got to do with it?" and "Dress to Impress!"

## WHAT'S DRESS GOT TO DO WITH IT?

*"I dress to be able to take care of my professional responsibilities"*

**Annie:** *Professionalism for me is about showing up on time, knowing what to do, and solving problems. How you dress has very little to do with that. It's more about your value system ... There couple of teachers here who dressy in a very conservative style, that is, the whole jacket and tie thing, but they can't seem to make it into work on time... I dress to be able to take care of my professional responsibilities.*

Annie's remarks reveal her observation that "dressy, conservative" do not necessary translate into responsible work behaviors. In her view, has very little to with the performance of her teacher responsibilities, as evidenced by her less "professional" colleagues. Instead, she believes that professionalism begins with a value system, which by inference indicates that being a professional teacher is a state of mind or moral code that is carried out through behaviors that do not include behavior. As such, dress is nothing more than a means to allow her to carry out her professional behaviors, or in her words, *responsibilities*.

Although not directly stated in Annie's discourse, she appears to be saying that dress or appearance doesn't count for very much in being a professional teacher. Danielle's discourse elaborates on this notion in a similar but related vein.

*"I don't want my appearance to interfere with my students' ability to learn."*

**Danielle:** *My definition of professionalism is knowing what your students' needs are and adjusting curriculum and instruction to meet those needs. The definition is actually a lot more than that... It's hard for me to give a clear definition of what professionalism means in terms of how I dress. I don't want my appearance to interfere with my students' ability to learn, so I dress*

*in a way that doesn't engage their curiosity very much... I hope that makes me a professional teacher in other people's eyes...I don't think that how I dress has much to do with who I am as a professional.*

Danielle clearly does not believe that how she dresses has anything to do with who she is as a professional. This is paradoxical because she states that as a teacher she tries to dress in a way that does not interfere with student learning, going as far as to not dress in a curiosity-provoking manner. These are clearly choices she is making about dress and appearance as a professional teacher. Her lack of confidence in her choice of dress is indicated by her "hope" that these choices are viewed as ones a professional teacher would make.

Danielle's and Annie's discourses express the same sentiment that a teacher's dress should not be included in any discussion or definition of teacher professionalism. Rather, teacher professionalism is about fulfilling one's professional responsibilities, for knowing how what curriculum and instruction to deliver to students, and/or downplaying one's personhood or self so that students can learn. Following this line of thinking, teachers as *presences* are erased for the act of teaching, at least for teacher professionals.

### **DRESS TO IMPRESS!**

*"It takes a certain amount of professionalism to... set one's personal dress tastes aside."*

**Lee:** *Teachers who take their work seriously dress so that students have positive role models. It takes a certain amount of professionalism to understand this, and even more to set one's personal*

*dress tastes aside in order to dress in a way that is appropriate to educating impressionable students... I consider my dress very professional and think I am a positive role model for students.*

Lee's point of view is different from Annie and Danielle in two significant ways. First, instead of dismissing the role of a teacher's dress in educating students, he includes the understanding the teacher dress in educating students part of being a professional teacher. Second, he believes that students are "impressionable" and are learning about appropriate adult dress from their teachers. As such, he is also aware of the "sacrifice" that professional teachers need to make to be effective. Although Lee is unique in his construction of teacher professionalism as the willingness sacrifice one's own dress taste when dressing for work, he is hardly alone in his belief that teachers need to be aware of the impression they create for students and others.

*"A professional teacher is aware of how much he or she is under the microscope."*

**Bill:** *Since I first became a teacher I changed my dress style. I realize now that teachers are role models for students. A professional teacher is aware of how much he or she is under the microscope, and is very careful about what he or she does and says and dresses....The longer I teach, the more I am aware of how much of teaching and even moving on to administration is about dressing the part. Being a professional is in part about knowing how to dress...*

Similar to Lee, Bill is highly aware of the role of dress in constructing the self as teacher. For Bill, professional teachers are highly attuned to the fact that they are "under the microscope" by students and administration. While it is uncertain why Bill feels so

much scrutiny from administrators or even his students, it is likely that his ambition and efforts to become an administrator have made him sensitive to the need to both be “careful” about his words and deeds as well as to “dress the part.” From this last remark it is clear that dress is intrinsic to successful performing the roles of an administrator as well as a teacher. Ultimately, for Bill dress is a way to create the impression of being a professional teacher, as well as administrator.

*“Being a professional is about making ... conscious choices about everything we do as teachers, including how we dress.”*

**Tonya:** *Being a professional teacher is about being deliberate about what you say and do around students. This is also true of dressing. In wearing the clothes I wear, I have chosen to present myself in a certain way so that students understand something about me... What I wear is as much about them as it is about me. It's about making a decision the kind of role model that you want to be for students... Being a professional is about making these kinds of conscious choices about everything we do as teachers, including how we dress.*

Similar to Lee and Bill, Tonya conceives of her dress as something to impress her students with in the sense of leaving an impression upon them. In most striking to Danielle who wants to erase herself from the classroom, Tonya chooses to present herself in a way that students get to know her better. Most striking about her discourses, however, is the role that *deliberateness* and *conscious choice* plays in her construction of teacher professionalism. For Tonya, there is no one way to be or look like a teacher professional. Being and looking like professional teacher is a matter of deciding the kind of role model one wants to be and “looking the part.” The key to her

interpreting her discourses, however, is her conceptualization of the role of teacher discretion in determining the kind of role model that teachers should be.

***“Who are you going to trust more, the teacher with the jeans and tee-shirt or the one with the jacket on?”***

**Russ:** *Professionalism is being responsible to students, their parents, other teachers and administrators. Part of earning their confidence in you is not only to act responsibly, but it’s important to look like a teacher too... Teachers have to look like they’re not on drugs even if they are, if you know what I mean...Who are you going to trust more, the teacher with the jeans and tee-shirt or the one with the jacket on? One may act more professionally than the other, but who are you going to assume is the professional just because of how he looks?*

Russ’ discourses about teacher professionalism and dress is similar to the others above in that he conceives of professionalism as being responsible to members of the school community. He takes the notion of professionalism a step further by asserting the role of earning confidence and the role of dress in establishing one’s trustworthiness. In fact, for Russ, dress can even be a means of looking responsible and trustworthy when in fact the teacher may not be. In his view, dress is a means of impressing others with one’s responsibility and trustworthiness as a teacher, boiling down to little more than making a dress change. “Looking like a teacher” for Russ, that is looking like a professional teacher, means making the decision to wear a jacket rather than a tee-shirt and jeans.

***“Dressing well...helps a great deal in terms of being perceived as a professional”***

**Mike:** *Professionalism...is really about the work you do. I like to wear a jacket and a tie every day, but does that make me a professional? Not really. If I’m a professional at all it’s because I’m*

*pretty good at getting kids to learn... I do all the things that go without saying like collaborate with others... participate in as many things as I can...Dressing well, that's just icing on the cake. It think it helps a great deal in terms of being perceived as a professional, but it won't do you any good if you don't have the actions to back it up.*

Mike's discourses reveal his awareness of how he dresses in terms of how he is perceived by others as a professional. At the same time he also recognizes that dressing well is "icing on the cake" in terms of being a professional teacher if the actions are not there to verify the image created. Stated otherwise, teachers may at first impress others by their dress, but it in terms of being a professional teacher it is meaningless unless he/she backs it up by what is done in the classroom.

When asked to explain who the "perceivers" are in reference to his statement about dress helping teachers being perceived as professionals, he claimed that they are "Everybody. Students, colleagues, administrators, parents, and of course the public. I want to be respected for what I do, and dressing well helps." Mike's concern for being respected as a professional teacher by the public echoes a concern that emerge from many of the discourses in print media articles in support of regulating teacher dress practices. While Mike is not advocating that teachers should wear a dress code in order to earn the respect of the public, he is aware that it helps in how teachers are perceived by the public. As will be seen below, Mike is not alone in believing that improved teacher dress can enhance the respectability of professional teachers.

***"There should be a certain look that all teachers should have."***

**Dee:** *I think there should be a certain look that all teachers should have. It should be serious, sedate and purposeful. I hate the way most teachers dress – really unprofessional. A professional*

*should look mature, non-flashy, but not boring either. Of course, I prefer suits and ties for the men, and skirt or pant suits for women... If teachers do not take their appearances seriously, how can they expect their students or the parents to take them seriously either? It is a huge mistake when teacher wears jeans to school. Who respects that?*

Dee's discourses about professional teacher dress follow Mike's construction of dress as a means of impressing others, but she takes a much more strident position on the subject. Dee not only takes the position that teachers should look a certain way, but articulates what that look should be. If teachers fail to take their appearances seriously, how can anyone else take them seriously either? Fundamentally, her argument about teacher dress is about teachers making a favorable, serious impression upon students, parents and beyond.

Central to Dee's construction of professional teacher dress is that they should be "serious, sedate and purposeful." This of course raises the question of what "purposeless" dress looks like, and when asked Dee replied, "Any dress that doesn't help students learn." What is particularly Dee's perspective is her construction of what is and is not respectable professional dress. Suits are respectable and jeans are not. The naming of these particular dress items in the discussion of respectable and non-respectable teacher dress is hardly novel. The majority of print media articles in support of the regulation of teacher dress make the same arguments.

What is unusual about Dee's construction is that she believes there should be a "look" that all teachers should wear. When asked whether she favored a teacher uniform, she replied, "It should be more like a dress code, like the kids have." This

point of view is very much in keeping with print media arguments that support the regulation of teacher dress. It is a somewhat surprising point of view for a teacher to hold, although one that the researcher has often encountered professionally in working with principals who believe that their teacher staffs are not dressed appropriately. That Dee should believe in a regulated dress code for professional teachers is not surprising in light of her conservative beliefs. While she was the only teacher of the sample studied who held this point of view, the researcher is aware that there are likely to be many others who share her concern for the respectability of being a professional teacher.

*“Professional teacher dress style is clothes that make the teacher look approachable and appropriate.”*

**Rhoda:** *...Being a professional is being educated and knowing how to apply that education in the field ...In terms in dressing, I'm not really sure “professional” really applies. I think that for a lot of teachers that word means wearing a suit and looking all crisp and serious... In the teacher world, I think a “professional” can look very different, certainly something more relaxed and approachable than a suit. For me, professional teacher dress style is clothes that make the teacher look approachable and appropriate.*

Rhoda’s construction of a professional teacher is evocative of Tonya’s. Similar to Tonya who believes that teachers can be a role model for students through dress in a variety of ways, Rhoda believes that word “professional” when applied to the world of teaching can be interpreted in ways that are different from the traditional interpretation. For her, professional teacher dress style is one that impresses students with the teacher’s approachability. When asked to elaborate on what “appropriate” dress is, Rhoda stated

that, “It depends on the age of the students, where you’re teaching, and what your gut tells you.”

“Appropriate” is one of the most frequently used words in discussions about the regulation of student dress in print media articles. What makes Rhoda’s definition of this word different from those of the print media articles is that it goes beyond the usual definition found in these articles. The usual general definition found in these articles is that appropriate dress for teachers is modest, conservative, and sensitive to the developmental age of students. Rhoda’s definition includes the need to be aware of the social and physical environments, as well as what the teacher senses is right for the teaching situation. In short, whereas the usual definition of “appropriate” teacher dress can be viewed as limiting and constrictive of teacher judgment, Rhoda’s definition is more empowering of teachers’ judgment.

Many of the controversies that have arisen out of discussions of regulating teacher dress have centered not only on this very issue of what is and isn’t appropriate, but also who decides what appropriate is. These debates have naturally lead back to questions about the “content” and “purpose” of teacher. Ultimately, the questions asked during this study of teacher dress all are ways of asking the same question: What is the meaning of teacher dress as it is used by teachers?

### *Summary of Dress and Professionalism*

In the above section, teachers’ constructions of professions fell into one of two camps: Those who questioned the role of dress in being a teacher professional and those who believed that dress is closely linked to teacher professionalism.

For those in the former (Annie and Danielle), dress simply figured very little or not at all into the formula of being a professional teacher. Although Danielle's discourses seem to both assert and deny dress as expression of professional, ultimately she and Annie appear to agree that their external appearance as mediated by dress had little to do with what made them professional teachers.

For those in the latter (Rhoda, Lee, Bill, Russ, Tonya, Mike, and Dee), dress plays a vital role in how teacher professionalism is displayed. As these teachers' discourses revealed, dress enables teachers to wear the costume of the kind of professional teacher they hope to be perceived as. Rather than deny or overlook the performative nature of dress, teachers who acknowledge its potential in their practice use the manipulation of appearance to establish their professional legitimacy.

It is hoped that the above demonstrates the nuanced and often contradictory ways that teachers conceptualize their dress practices in relationship to their work as professional roles. In the following chapter, the research will draw conclusions from the findings as well as offer suggestions for further research and policy.

## Chapter 6

### CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS:

#### FASHION FORWARD AND BEYOND

At the beginning of this paper the researcher argued that there has been significant criticism of teacher dress in print media and popular imagination, and that this criticism includes the assertion that many teachers do not care about their appearance as professionals. While in some cases this is no doubt true (as it is in other fields of employment), it is hoped that this the data presented in this study demonstrates that some teachers do make conscious decisions about how they dress in relationship to how they perceive their professional teacher role. While their reasons for how and why they choose a particular dress style or styles may be significantly different from one teacher to another, the data suggest that teachers generally do not simply put on any old thing they have in their closets to go to work. Rather, when questioned about their dress choices some teachers affirm an awareness of the potential influence that dress can have upon their students and other members of the school community, and that dress is selected and manipulated in relationship to and in dialogue with the school environment. Either as an extension or contradiction of their personal ideology, the data indicate that some teachers are not only fully aware of the potential of dress in their professional activity, but also use dress to help define the who they conceptualize they are as teachers. While this may hardly be a surprising conclusion in light of the work Goffman, Entwistle, and other sociologists and fashion theorists discussed in Chapter 3,

how the study's participants conceptualized dress in relationship to their teaching practice in New York City revealed some unanticipated features.

This chapter is organized into five sections. The first section revisits the purpose of the study, the second and third draw conclusions from the findings in response to the study's two research questions, the fourth discusses implications and suggests areas for policy, research and practice, and the last offers final remarks.

### **Purpose of the Study Revisited**

Over the course of the research period it became evident during numerous academic, professional and supermarket checkout line discussions that how teachers dress for work continues to be a contentious topic for many. What this study has proposed to do is offer some insight into how one group of New York City public high school teachers view their dress practices in relationship to how they perceive their professional role as teachers. It is hoped that by investigating this topic educators and policy makers may gain insight into the rich and varied meanings some teachers may attach to their dress practices. It is especially hoped that in gaining such insight, educators and policy makers may begin to recognize that teachers make thoughtful decisions about how they present themselves as teachers, and that these decisions reflect a myriad of considerations, prime among them how they perceive their work in the schools.

As stated earlier, the researcher returned to the classroom teaching during the time period that data was being collected and analyzed. When informed of this change,

participants' attitudes became noticeably more relaxed and collegial. Particularly during the follow-up interview process, the researcher found that we spent as much if not more time "talking shop" about our teaching as we did about the study. Ultimately, I believe that my return to the classroom resulted in improving the quality of the research. First, the change in status from researcher to fellow teacher enabled me to develop stronger relationships with the participants and made it possible for more candid responses to questions. Secondly, working on the study inevitably forced me to reconsider my own dress choices for work on a daily basis, and to engage in conversations about dress with my colleagues simply because they are aware of and curious about my inquiry in this area.

Although the official data collection period is over, I continue to have discussions with former participants about dress, and particularly about the dress choices of teachers who have been newly hired by the schools where research was conducted. Surprisingly, one of principals where research was conducted requested that I return on a professional development day to share findings of the study. While not an intended outcome of the study, it is gratifying to see that "validating" the discussion of teacher dress via scholarly inquiry has enabled one administrator to regard teacher dress as an area for fertile discussion and more than just as a 'neutral' fact of daily existence in the schools that is vacant of any kind of symbolic or personal meaning.

### **Conclusions: Research Question One**

Research question one asked the following: *What role does dress play in the construction of the teacher self?* As stated in Chapter 1, 'dress' is defined as clothing,

shoes and accessories worn in the social performance of daily life activities (Entwistle 2002). As an extension of this definition, it was assumed that teachers make choices of their dress for work that they perceive as different from other social and situated occasions in their lives. Additionally, in this study the term *teacher self* describes the person-as-teacher within the context of the school culture and classroom. The teacher self involves a set of understandings and constructions of what teaching is and should be, and the roles that teachers play in the classroom, school and world. Importantly, the teacher self is a set of behaviors and practices that are articulated through speech, mannerisms, grooming and dress. Given these definitions, Research Question One is directed to exploring how teachers may use dress to construct a 'self' in their teacher role.

Themes emerging from data collected in responses from face-to-face interview questions provide support for the following two conclusions:

1. Of the study sample, most teachers construct a connection between how they dress to being a professional teacher;
2. Of the teachers interviewed, all believed that their students conceptualized them as being either "liberal" or "conservative" based on their dress style.

Conclusions in response to Research Question One were drawn principally from responses to Questions 2 and 4 of the Interview Questions. The first conclusion to Research Question One sheds light upon the different attitudes teachers have towards the relationship between their dress practice and constructions of self as professional teachers. The second conclusion reveals teachers' conceptualization that students make

political/moral judgments about them based upon their dress practices. Taken together, these two conclusions suggest that not only does dress serve to help define the teacher self, but also that it serves to help “define” teachers to students in political/moral terms.

*Most teachers construct a connection between how they dress to being a professional teacher*

In Chapter 1 *professionalism* was identified as the term invoked the most frequently in analyses of print media that address teacher dress as well as in interviews with study participants. In this study, *professionalism* means ‘having a tacit understanding of what is universally socially appropriate in terms of dress, speech and manners for the teaching environment that is enacted by the teacher on a daily basis in the school environment. Following this, a teacher *professional* is one who possesses these qualities.

Findings revealed that teachers’ conceptualizations of the relationship between dress and professionalism fell more or less into one of two camps: Those who conceptualized dress as closely linked to teacher professionalism and those who questioned the role of dress in constructing a professional teacher self. What is striking is that seven of nine (78%) teachers interviewed articulated that dress played an integral part of the construction of teacher professionalism. For these teachers, dress plays a vital role in how teacher professionalism is embodied. However, dressing as a professional teacher had different expressions for the teachers interviewed. For some, dressing professionally means dressing as a ‘corporate’ role model, i.e., dressing a manner associated with how business professionals dress; others dressed according to

what they conceived from their own schooling experiences as ‘the part’ of teacher; others used dress to earn both their students’ and others’ respect; and others dressed in a way they perceived as making their students feel comfortable. In sum, data suggested that the majority of the teachers interviewed recognized the potential of dress as communicating something about themselves as professional teachers. However, how teachers conceptualized professional dress varied considerably.

There are several ways to interpret why so many teachers of the sample articulated a connection between dress and constructing a professional teacher self. Considering the variety of conceptualizations that teachers articulated to define their professional work and dress for it, the data suggest that teachers used dress differently to express their *social identity* as a teacher. As Davis asserts,

social identity (includes) any aspect of self about which individuals can through symbolic means communicate with others, in the instance of dress through predominantly non-discursive visual, tactile, and olfactory symbols, however imprecise and elusive these may be. *In any case, the concept of social identity points to the configuration of attributes and attitudes persons seek to and actually do communicate about themselves.* (Davis 1992, 16, emphasis mine)

Data collected from the seven teachers who conceptualized dress as contributing to the teacher self reveal a high concern for how others (i.e., teachers, parents, students, administrators, and ‘the public’) regarded their work as teachers. For these teachers,

presenting a 'teacherly' self through dress took precedence over presenting "who they are as a person" through dress style.

It should be noted that this concern for creating a social identity through dress was expressed by teachers representing a broad range of personal backgrounds and did not appear to be a concern for any one particular social, cultural or age demographic. This suggests that for teachers, choice of dress is one of the ways that teachers can visually display their professionalism. While it can be asserted that teachers who use dress to accomplish this may be simply responding to the relatively low social position that teaching occupies in the popular imagination, it is important to consider that not all teachers articulated that they were dressing "professionally" (read *corporate*) for the benefit of administrators and 'the public.' The data also demonstrates that those who articulated concern for the role of dress in their professional lives are keenly aware of the position they play as teachers in the eyes of their students. These teachers recognize, following Goffman, "when an individual appears before others, he knowingly and unwittingly projects a definition of the situation, of which a conception of himself is an important part." (Goffman 1990 [1959], 242) In other words, some teachers use dress to construct a teacher self for the benefit of their students, to define the teaching and learning environment, and to establish a boundary between themselves and those they teach.

It is also important to consider the two teachers who reported that dress was either a very small or no part of how they conceptualized their 'performance' of being a professional teacher. Compared with the rest of the sample, both teachers are relatively

inexperienced, female and young. While Danielle's responses seem to both assert and deny dress as an expression of being professional, ultimately she and Annie appear to agree that their external appearance as mediated by dress had little to do with what make them professional teachers. Stated otherwise, neither teacher conceptualized a strong connection between how they dressed and how they performed their work as teachers. By extension, one can infer that neither of these teachers conceives of the teacher body as having much or any impact upon their students, and that they conceive of their bodies as both irrelevant and 'invisible' to their students.

There are several possibilities to explain these two teachers' conceptualizations. Their questionable commitment to remaining in the profession, their youth, education and teacher training may in part explain their attitudes toward dress. Sixth-year teachers when I interviewed them, both indicated that they might soon be leaving teaching. Danielle's demeanor and responses during interviews indicated imminent professional "burn-out" although at the time of this writing she continues to serve the NYCDOE. Her commitment to continuing as a teacher is still unclear, and it is possible that her ambivalence about the role that dress plays in her professional life can be taken as an indication about her ambivalence about remaining in the profession. Like Danielle, Annie informed me that she was planning to leave teaching but continues teaching in the NYCDOE today. Annie has a fairly well-developed notion of what professional teacher dress consists of (i.e., anything 'dressy' or 'conservative') and made a decision to reject this attire for herself. Judging from the data collected in discourse and my observations, Annie's dress practices have more to do with her youth than with

transgressive ideology, educational or otherwise. Given the observable success with the students she teaches, it is somewhat understandable that she should believe that her clothes have little to do her being a professional teacher. Because she does not distinguish between the clothes she wears as a teacher and those worn otherwise, her 'teacher look' is invisible to her. She appears not to fully appreciate, however, that her success with the students she serves in part may be attributed to the young, hip teacher she presents through her dress and body expression to her students.

Another possible reason that both Annie and Danielle discount the importance of their bodies in their teaching is comfort level in acknowledging their body as a *presence* in the classroom. For them, discussion of the teacher body is simply irrelevant or "unworthy" for discussion. As Shapiro, McWilliams, hooks have pointed out, traditional Western, male-dominated thought has created a false dichotomy between the mind and body. As part of this line of thinking, the importance of the human body has been devalued or denied, particularly in academic discussions about teaching and learning. As hooks points out

The person who is most powerful has the privilege of denying their body.

I remember as an undergraduate I had while male professors who wore the same tweed jacket and rumpled shirt or something, but we all knew that we had to pretend. You would never comment on his dress, because to do so would be a sign of your own intellectual lack. The point was we should all respect that he's there to be a mind and not a body. (hooks 1994, 137)

Following this, it is possible that the two teachers who minimized the role of their bodies in instruction may feel that as teachers, they do not have to take the possible impact of their physical beings upon students into account since they were hired to teach with their minds and not their bodies. As hooks (1994), McWilliam (1996), Kincheloe, Steinber and Tippins (1999) have observed, in traditional Western thought there is conceptual separation between the mind and body in how human beings experience the world. In the schools, this conceptualization not only influences how curriculum is organized and instruction delivered, but also how teachers conceive of the role that their bodies play in the teaching and learning process. Therefore, while Annie and Danielle's dismissal of the role of teachers' physical presence in the teaching and learning process was not articulated by the majority of the study's participants, their attitude is likely to be representative of many teachers educated in traditional Western schools.

*Of the teachers interviewed, all believed that their students conceptualized them as being either "liberal" or "conservative" based on their dress style.*

It is important to consider that how teachers dress for work, and even more importantly, how teachers dress to create a kind of impression upon students, is deeply rooted with the context of the imagination of popular culture. As Dana Polan has pointed out, clichés and stereotypes in the cultural text contribute to the construction of the classroom environment. She contends that

for many students, the teacher is not a conduit to knowledge that exists elsewhere: the teacher is an image, a cliché in the sense both of stereotype

but also photographic imprinting that freezes knowledge in the seeming evidences, where the image predetermines what the person means to us...The medium is the message, and the image of the (teacher) often matters more than the ideas of the lesson. (Polan 1993, 32)

Situated in the same culture as their students, teachers cannot help but be familiar with the same clichés and stereotypes that students have about teachers. That data above suggest that for the study participants these clichés and stereotypes are principally expressed as *the liberal teacher* and *the conservative teacher*, both of which find expression in dress practices.

One of the most interesting findings of the study is that teachers used the identical or similar words and phrases to describe how their students conceptualized them as those found in print media discourses about teacher dress. Similar to the print media discourses, data collected from teachers suggested a political/moral division between how the teachers conceptualized being perceived by their students based upon dress style.

The juxtaposition of the two different sets of terms used by the sample to articulate how their students conceptualize them echoes the findings of print media discourses about the regulation of teacher dress discussed in Chapter 2. Similar to those findings, the ways that teachers conceptualize their students' impressions of them reflect the ideological differences between conservative and liberal "moral thought" described in Lakoff's (2002) *Moral Politics: How Conservatives and Liberals Think*. Similar to Lakoff's conception of adherents to conservative "strict father morality," some teachers

articulated that they thought their dress style indicated to their students that they were “serious,” “strict” and “professional” and that they had “expectations,” were focused on “achievement,” were “rigorous” and “reserved.” By contrast, other teachers’ discourses about how their students conceptualized them reflected Lakoff’s conception of adherents to liberal “nurturant parent morality.” These teachers articulated that they believed that their students conceptualized them as “approachable,” “open-minded” and “professional,” and that they were “fun,” “expressive,” “different” and “innovative” based on their dress style.

The data collected in teacher interviews about the relationship between teacher dress and how their students perceive them suggests another articulation of the opposition between “conservative” and “liberal” arguments for and against the regulation of teacher dress. As discussed in Chapter 2, this juxtaposition can be best understood as a reflection of ongoing historical tensions of the bipartisan politics of the United States. What is particularly noticeable from data collected in teacher interviews is apparent political/moral tension among how teachers dress, their political orientation and how they believe their students conceptualize them (Figure 7, below). While twice as many teachers consider themselves politically liberal, in self they construct through dress twice as many teachers believe they “appear” conservative to students as they do liberal. The contrast between how teachers manipulate their appearance to convey a political/moral orientation that contradicts their actual one can be seen in Lee, Mike and Russ. For these three, one can infer each considers the construction of a conservative teacher self more advantageous than a liberal one for reasons discussed in Chapter 5.

What is interesting is that these teachers recognize the social advantage of manipulating their appearance in the schools and consciously engage in misrepresenting themselves to students so that they create a particular impression. This follows Tseelon’s assertion in that in the post-modern world, self-presentation can “connote disguise or distortion or misrepresentation...as actors attempt to create *impressions*.” (Tseelon 1992, 116)

All of the teachers interviewed articulated that their students’ impressions of them were that they were “professional.” Similar to the findings of print media documents, data from the study reveals that there is more than one way to be “professional.” For six of the teachers, the kind of professional teacher they

**Figure 7: Synopsis of Teachers’ Self-Described Dress Style, Political Orientation, and Conceptualizations of How They Are Perceived by Students**

<b>Pseudonym</b>	<b>Self-Described Dress Style for School</b>	<b>Self-described Political Orientation</b>	<b>How Teachers Believe Student Perceive Them</b>
Bill	Business	Conservative	Conservative
Tonya	Ethnic	Liberal	Liberal
Danielle	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Mike	Conservative	Liberal	Conservative
Russ	Conservative	Liberal	Conservative
Annie	Casual	Liberal	Liberal
Dee	Conservative	Conservative	Conservative
Rhoda	Casual	Liberal	Liberal
Lee	Business	Liberal	Conservative

believe their students conceptualize them as is conservative. For the remaining three, the kind of professional they believe their students conceptualized as liberal. Remembering how the term *professional* is used in this study, one can infer that twice as

many teachers in this study believe that it is better to be perceived by students as a conservative professional teacher than a liberal one. While there is evidence to suggest that personal reasons influence why teachers use dress to construct a particular self for work in the schools, it is important to also consider the students populations where the teachers work. Judging from observations of the student while conducting research in the schools, the teachers' choice of a more conservative dress style was to some degree a response to what might be best described as undisciplined behavior. In such an environment it is understandable that some teachers would choose to manipulate their exterior appearance to convey authority to students.

The participants' belief that their students conceptualized them in political/moral terms might also reveal how teachers conceive of their work in the New York City public schools or teaching in general. While the researcher did not specifically ask teachers whether they viewed their work as teachers as a form of political activity, in the course of data collection three (Dee, Bill, Russ) expressed that teaching was a form of political activism. Based on the findings of how teachers felt they were perceived by students, it is clear that all of the teachers perceived their work as having a political/moral content, and by extension, that teaching is a form of political activity for them. Based on the researcher's experience, it is not uncommon for teachers in the New York City public schools to regard – either on a conscious or subconscious level – their work as a form of “political activity.” Teaching in an urban setting such as New York City requires teachers to surmount multiple hardships such as lack of funds for supplies/furniture, deteriorating physical plant, overcrowded classrooms, etc. on a daily

basis. Those of us who accept the challenges of teaching in such environments conceive of teaching as serving a “higher” purpose, that is educating traditionally underserved populations, which makes it psychologically easier to deal with the challenges. In consideration of this, it is possible to interpret the teacher’s belief that their students conceive of them in political/moral terms as either a conscious or subconscious expression of how the teachers conceive of their work as having a political/moral content.

In the next section conclusions from Research Question Two are presented. As will be seen, there is some conceptual overlap between the conclusions of both research questions.

### **Conclusions: Research Question Two**

Research question two asked the following: To what extent do teachers use dress as an expression of instruction, personal ideology or agency in the schools? This question is directed toward the potential use of teacher dress to resist the often tacit but ubiquitous educational directive for “teacher efficiency,” a directive that neglects the importance of the humanistic aspects of teaching. Given that many teachers must perform their teaching responsibilities in a professional environment that has displaced their desire to invent and experiment instructionally, the question above addresses the possibility that teachers may use their choice of dress for work as one of the few areas in which to express their individuality and creativity as well as their resistance to an oppressive professional environment. Moreover, the question allows for the possibility

that teachers may use appearance to instruct a 'covert' personal curriculum for which there is no standard for determining their "efficiency."

Themes emerging from data collected in responses from face-to-face interview questions provide support for the following two conclusions:

1. Some teachers use choice of dress to extend, embody, validate and/or conceal their teacher selves;
2. The two most influential factors upon some teachers' dress are the teachers' concept of teacher self and the social/physical conditions of the school.

*Teachers use choice of dress to extend, embody, validate and/or conceal their teacher selves*

A principal finding of this study (revealed by data collected in Interview Question 1) is that some teachers use dress to extend and/or embody their teacher selves while others use dress to conceal or validate their teacher selves. As discussed in Chapter 5, the majority of the sample studied belonged to the first group.

Similar to one of the conclusions to Research Question One, all of the teachers employed terms and phrases about their dress and teaching styles that were consistent with Lakoff's terminology to describe difference between conservatives and liberals. Following the conservative-liberal dichotomy, terms such as "serious," "strict," and "traditional" are the conceptual opposites of terms such as "unconventional," "innovative" and "non-traditional." These also characterize the division between conservatives and liberals respectively.

That all of the teachers interviewed engaged in a political/moral vernacular to describe their dress and teaching styles is unsurprising within the context of the study and the history of American education. The current conceptualization of schools as spaces in which students' moral faculties can be cultivated has its roots in mid-nineteenth century educational thought (Spring 2005). As teachers, we tend to recognize that our behaviors – speech, body movements, and physical appearance – can have some kind of effect upon our students ranging from not at all to a very immediate one. For Hansen, these behaviors can and should have a moral dimension. As Hansen asserts, “not everything that teachers do *necessarily* has moral significance, but any action a teacher takes *can* have moral import...(therefore) teachers might also be encouraged to see their work as morally layered in meaning.” (Hansen 1993, 669) While Hansen does not specifically acknowledge the role of dress in contributing to the moral dimension of teaching, data collected from study participants suggest that teachers conceive of their dress style and teaching style in these political/moral terms. Similar to the discourses in print media concerned with regulating teacher dress and teacher discourses in responses to other interview questions in this study, teacher discourses about the relationship between their dress and teaching styles suggested the same conservative-liberal political/moral dimension of how they conceive of their work as teachers.

As discussed in the previous section, some teachers use dress not only to represent who they are as teachers, but also for a variety of other purposes that include concealing or validating who they are or what they do as teachers. This can be seen in how some of study's teachers use of conservative dress as means of masking “non-

traditional” curriculum and instruction. Teachers who conceptualize dress this way do so either to “protect” themselves as teachers or to validate their instructional choices. That teachers choose to use dress this way should not be surprising. As mentioned in Chapter 1, assessing teacher quality by their “efficiency” or “effectiveness” (i.e., student achievement on standardized tests) has become a prevalent concern in the schools since the passing of the 2000 No Child Left Behind legislation. In donning the conservative ‘professional’ attire in the classroom was conceptualized by teachers as a means of displaying one’s ‘seriousness of purpose’ (read *helping students to achieve high test scores*) in order to conceal a more innovative or progressive curriculum. In this regard, ‘professional’ dress is used by teachers as a cover for potentially subversive instruction. Considered otherwise, in using professional dress this way, teachers have appropriated the State and popularly approved corporate style of dress in the schools as a means of concealing from administrators and others the non-traditional content of what they teach.

*The two most influential factors upon teacher dress are the teacher’s concept of teacher self and the social/physical conditions of the school*

Of all the conclusions drawn from the study’s data, this last conclusion may offer what might be called the “bottom line” response to why some teachers dress as they do in the schools. To restate the conclusion simply, some teachers dress as they do because of who they believe themselves to be and where they work.

The first factor influencing teacher dress practices is the teacher's concept of teacher self. The definition of *teacher self* has been discussed earlier in this paper. For the present discussion, it is important to examine the three ways in which teachers articulated a concept of teacher self: 1. The belief of being a role model for students; 2. Teacher's upbringing and/or experiences in school; and 3. The teacher's affective state. For the first, teachers articulated either that they were dressing to impress students in some way, or that they were using their dress to make students. For the second, teachers articulated that their understanding of how a teacher should look descended from their own experiences at school. For the last, teachers acknowledged that how they dressed reflected how they might feel on a particular day. In sum, all of the above reflect a highly personal concept of teacher self emanating from personal ideology, life experiences, and/or personality.

The second factor that teachers reported as influencing their dress choices for school was the school environment. In this instance, the term *environment* is used to designate a) the physical conditions, b) the school culture, and c) the student population.

Anyone having attended or taught public schools in the past 40 years in New York City cannot fail to notice the deteriorating conditions of many school buildings and the furniture. Despite the best efforts of the 700 mechanics, 931 custodian engineers, 81 building managers and approximately 300 other employees within the Division of School Facilities<sup>4</sup>, the general condition of educational facilities in is very poor. While

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<sup>4</sup> From the NYCDOE Division of School facilities website: <http://www.opt-osfns.org/dsf/reference/workingWithDSF.aspx>, access date 2/21/10

specific data concerning the precise conditions of all of the schools in the NYCDOE is not available, many teachers currently working at New York City public school teachers are likely to have tales about the destructive force of the schools' physical conditions upon one's garments. As a teacher, I have snagged many pair of pantyhose on fraying wooden desks and chairs, accidentally acquired macerated gum on shoes and other garments, and mysteriously accumulated mouse droppings in pants and cuffs. These are but a few of the misadventures I have had with the school facilities I have worked, and my experiences are hardly unique based upon the teachers with whom I have spoken. School environments are not nearly as financially tended to as corporate ones, and it is well-known among New York City public school teachers that conditions are perilous to clothes. For that reason it is understandable that protecting oneself and one's more delicate garments should be a factor in teacher dress choice. In other words, many teachers are unwilling to buy costlier clothes to work for fear of quickly destroying them. As such, wearing more durable clothes such as jeans becomes a sensible decision practically and financially.

Teachers also reported that *school culture* was a significant factor in influencing dress choice. As stated earlier, while this term that was pre-defined for teachers, over the course of data collection is because clear that the school's culture dictates "correct" or "incorrect" behavior. The study borrows Schein's (2004) definition of culture in reference to organizations: "a pattern of basic assumptions that a given group has invented, discovered, or developed in learning to cope with its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, and that has worked well enough to be considered

valued and therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way to perceive, think and feel in relation to those problems” (Schein 2004, 12). In reference to schools, then, school culture is defined as the set of assumptions and practices of a given school that teachers (and students) have learned and adopted into practice as a means successfully negotiating the school environment.

In terms of dressing for work, what other teachers wear to work contributes to how any individual interprets what is or is not appropriate for the teaching environment. Two of the study’s participants articulated that looked to other teachers and administrators to understand what to wear. Especially since teacher appearance is no longer regulated by the schools, these teachers have expressed that only way to reconcile one’s own understandings of appropriate teacher dress with that of the school in which one works is to have a careful look at what others are wearing. Assuming most other teachers (as well professionals in other fields) use the same strategy for “knowing” how to dress, it is perhaps easy to see how an assortment of stereotyped images of teachers can be unwittingly shared and passed on from one generation of teacher to the next.

The role of the *student population* in influencing teacher dress cannot be understated. This study was based in three New York City urban public high schools, all of which served socio-economically challenged populations. In some schools, the researcher observed students displaying a broad range of behaviors from boisterous and playful to aggressive and defiant. Experienced teachers know that addressing such behaviors effectively requires that a variety of non-verbal strategies such as adjusting

tone of voice, body proximity, humor, etc. For some teachers, however, taking proactive measures, such as manipulating appearance, helps to mediate student behavior. As Weber and Mitchell note

to many (teachers) clothing is not only a means of identifying oneself as a teacher, but is also a pedagogical strategy in itself, a means of commanding respect and order, of establishing a serious working atmosphere, and of exerting control. (Weber and Mitchell 1995, 64)

Following this notion, it is possible to infer that the teachers who cited the student population in influencing their dress practices, manipulating appearance is at the same time a means by which to exert covert control over and protect oneself against students who might engage in disrespectful or other inappropriate behaviors.

In sum, what should be evident from the above discussion is that there are a variety of factors that influence teacher's dress choice for work. Of these, only two – being a role model and responding to the student population – recognizes the possibility of teacher body as a pedagogical tool. The other factors can be categorized as being driven by ideology intrinsic to the teacher or by the extrinsic realities of teaching in urban public schools.

### **Implications for Research, Policy and Practice**

The meaning of any costume depends on circumstances. It is not 'spoken' in a vacuum, but at a specific place and time... to wear the costume considered 'proper' for a situation acts as a sign of involvement in it, and the person whose clothes do not conform to these standards is

likely to be more or less subtly excluded from participation (Lurie 1990, 12)

Similar to Lurie's line of thought above, this study found that of the teachers surveyed, all conceptualized themselves as dressing appropriately ('properly') for their work as teachers, as indicated by their discourses about the relationship between their dress and professional practice. In contrast to this, as I have argued in Chapter 2 there is a growing national dissatisfaction with how teachers dress for work, with lack of teacher 'appropriateness' as being of greatest concern. Implicit to this criticism is that there is this some kind of universally shared but unarticulated 'standard' of appropriate dress to which many teachers are not universally adhering. This, of course, begs two questions: What is the standard for teacher dress? Should teachers who do not follow the standard, as the above quotation asserts, be excluded from teaching? In essence, these two questions are the motivating force behind current discussions of teacher dress and are at the core of this research.

Admittedly, there is very little print media criticism of teacher dress emanating from New York City. As stated above, it is commonly known in New York City how challenging the physical conditions and student population can be. It may be that New York City teachers are not as frequently criticized in the media for "inappropriate" dress as teachers working in other communities across the country because of popular understanding of the challenges that teaching in New York City presents. This said, I know both anecdotally and from experience that New York City teachers are "talked to" by administrators about some of the ways that dress for work for reasons that include

inappropriate messages on t-shirts, revealing garments and offensive smell. As such, teachers in New York City are as likely as teachers everywhere to violate the unspoken 'standard' of what appropriate dress for teaching is.

To begin to address the above questions, it is essential that further investigation of teacher dress be conducted in other urban communities, as well as suburban and rural ones. This study was confined to examining a small group of teachers working in a densely populated urban environment. It is safe to assert that the socio-cultural environment of New York City is considerably different from that of Boise, Idaho or Mobile, Alabama. Gaining insight into the multiply-layered meanings of teacher dress in different communities across the country is likely to render interesting information about how teaching as a professional practice is conceived in region-specific areas. Moreover, it might reveal how different communities create a 'standard' of appearance for its teachers.

It is also hoped that further research will be conducted with students in the New York City public schools to examine who they actually conceptualize their teachers based upon their teachers dress for work. This study found that teachers believe their students conceptualize them as being liberal or conservative. As a further exploration of this finding, it would be interesting to investigate students' perceptions of "what the teacher is like" based upon teacher dress. Such a study might reveal not only the extent to which teacher appearance has upon students, but also how teacher dress practices serve as signifiers to students about their teachers' political/moral, socio-economic, cultural, etc. backgrounds. Student perceptions of their teachers would ultimately

provide another lens by which to view the role that teacher appearance plays in pedagogy.

One of the principal aims of the research is to shed light on teacher dress practices so that policy-makers can gain a clearer understanding of why teachers dress as they do, at least in an urban setting. Similar to the diversity of the 1.1 million students who attend public schools in New York City, the City's over 100,000 teachers equally represent a multiplicity of socio-economic, cultural, political/moral, religious and gendered backgrounds. These all inform the teachers' personal ideologies which themselves are expressed as – to varying degrees – dress practices for work. If any dress policies for teachers are to be developed and implemented, it is imperative that policy-makers first investigate the 'messages' that are being 'communicated' to students through the teachers' dress practices. If we are to seriously entertain the notion that teachers are being 'bad' role models for not dressing 'appropriately,' it is important to first understand what current teachers believe they is conveying through dress, and *if* they are thinking about their bodies and dress practices at all. Most importantly, however, it is essential to determine the extent to which students are influenced by their teachers dress styles, and how their learning may be affected by teacher dress before establishing any policies regulating teacher dress.

In thinking about what is "appropriate" dress for teachers, it is imperative to consider that dress practices as a whole in this and other post-industrial society have undergone a transformation as a since the advent of electronic media. Meyerowitz maintains that

As place and information access become disconnected, place-specific behaviors and activities begin to fade. The psychological and social distance among physical places is muted. As a result, dress codes in school and restaurants have come to seem antiquated or phony. And when people do “dress up” today, it is more likely than in the past to be viewed as a “costume” rather than a clear sign of personal identity. Further, people are less likely to wear the once “appropriate” dress for their role in a given place because places and roles are no longer seem that distinct. (Meyerowitz 1985, 148)

If dress practices in general dress practices across all social and professional spheres have become more “relaxed” over the past few decades, why should teachers be criticized more than others for a casual style of dress? Remembering that schools have been conceptualized since the mid-nineteenth century as spaces for moral development, it can be inferred that popular critics of teacher dress view casual articles of clothing (such tee-shirts and jeans) as a less moral model to students than “dress up” clothes do. Given this, ultimately the tension that exists between popular conceptualizations of how teachers *should* dress and how they actually do dress for work can be viewed as a dissonance between traditional, pre-technology age conceptualizations of teachers as moral role models and postmodern conceptualizations of teachers who not only are embodied in a variety of ways, but also present a model for students that is grounded in the teacher’s own, multilayered ideology. Ultimately, it is the dissonance between these two conceptualizations which is at the core of all discussions about teachers dress,

especially as it relates to the potential of teacher dress in educating students about what is appropriate adult professional dress in general.

Lastly, as stated at the outset of this dissertation, over the past three decades there has been increasing interest in teacher appearance in the public schools in this country. As the analysis of print media has revealed, some critics of current teacher dress practices have advocated for the establishment of a dress code and even uniform policies for on the local, state and even Federal levels. Many, including some of the study's participants, have articulated that teachers should dress in what Rubinstein has described as the "non-uniform uniform" style of the business suit that, when worn, "indicates...that the individual will suppress personal desires and sentiments and conduct himself or herself in the expected 'professional', manner. (Rubinstein 2001, 86)

In consideration of the highly intersubjective nature of the teaching learning and process as described in this study and beyond, it seems counterintuitive that any teacher would wish or even could *suppress* the emotions in the classroom. As these same critics and some of study's participants have asserted, the wearing of a suit indicates an image of 'authority', an image that has its origins in the nineteenth century that has lasted through present day. Understanding that this country is just now emerging from a relatively long period of conservative government, it should not be surprising that there is still increasing interest in having teachers adopt a more conservative style of dress. Only time will tell to determine whether a continued liberal political/moral presence in the White House and legislature will translate into a more liberal interpretation of how teachers should look in the classroom. This, however, does not seem likely. As

discussed throughout this paper, there are multiple economic, cultural, scientific, political and technological forces (to name a few) that affect fashion change within a society, and very difficult to isolate any single force as causing a shift in what people wear.

Similar to those who advocate for dress code and uniform policies for students, proponents of teacher dress code and uniform policies have asserted that adopting these policies will result in higher student achievement. As the national longitudinal research conducted by David Brunσμα has shown, there is little clear evidence to support that regulating student dress has any effect upon student achievement (Brunσμα 2004, 180), and it can be inferred that regulating teacher dress is likely to have a similar non-impresion. What is most important to understand both the student dress code uniform movement and the current interest in regulating teacher dress are the motivations behind them which, ultimately *politically* rather than *educationally* driven. As Dowd argues, the efforts to “uniform” students is

a symbolic effort grounded in the desire to control, discipline, and structure an extremely complicated process of schooling children. The uniform seeks to do this through altering appearance, because somehow we believe that appearances matter; superficiality is easier than the truth of hardship, struggle, pain and worse, hatred. Uniforms have done exactly that, brought home the lessons that appearance matter, the very thing they were supposed to be against. (Dowd 1996, 13)

In the same way, one can infer that discussions about the regulation of teacher dress are an extension of the same political and symbolic effort control the complicated process of teaching and learning in the public schools. While it may be popularly believed that insisting that teachers dress in an agreed-upon 'standard' style with help to "fix the ills" of the country's struggling education system, there is no evidence to support the belief that changing either the students' or teachers' appearances will resolve these challenges. In the end, any local, regional or national efforts to establish a teacher dress policy will have to provide a different rationale besides improving educational outcomes to justify why doing so will benefit to students.

One of the schools principals where research was conducted asked whether the study might lead to teachers dressing "better" at her school. While it was not one of the study's objectives to have teachers change their dress styles, the researcher did observe that some of the study participants engaged in casual conversations with teachers not involved in the study about their dress practices for work. It is hoped that this study will serve to better inform practice, not only in considering the potential of teacher in influencing instruction, but also in reflecting upon the effect of the total teaching environment upon students. As this study has revealed, some teachers completely discount the potential impact of their physical appearance upon their students and the teaching and learning process. Similarly, some teachers pay little or no attention to other environmental attributes of their classrooms such as physical layout, lighting, neatness, etc. While it falls outside the scope of this paper to address the sociological and psychological impact of these environmental elements – including teacher

appearance – personal experience has often revealed that many teachers and administrators are likely to report that these most definitely matter in terms of creating learning environment. It is hoped that the data produced in this study will help teachers improve practice by reflecting seriously upon the potential of their dress practices as an extension of the learning environment.

### **Final Remarks**

Over the course of my career as a teacher and scholar, I have developed an increasing interest in the educational potential of what might be best described as the “invisible” and non-verbal aspects of schooling. As part of this interest, I have started to reflect upon how school environments look, sound, feel and smell, and the role that these potentially have in the teaching and learning process. The current investigation into teacher dress practices is an extension of my interest in the daily lived experience of teaching in public schools. This study is directed towards question how meanings may be created by teachers’ conscious or unconscious personal practices.

This study has required me both as a teacher and human being to examine what I communicate through appearance. Clearly, how I have presented myself through dress has changed several times throughout my career in response to my age, size, budget and most importantly, the communities in which I have worked. As some teachers in this study have articulated, having an understanding of the background and needs of the population one is teaching is essential, and deeply influences what I do and do not wear to work.

This study has also thrust into light the possibility and extent to which students may view us as political/moral beings. Following the study's conclusion that teachers perceive their students as conceptualizing them as political/moral beings based on dress, my own experiences affirms that students do conceptualize teachers this way. During my career I have never once told students anything about my political orientation yet I have heard students conjecture about my political orientation on several occasions. Never having questioned the students about their beliefs about my political orientation, I can only conjecture that they were basing these beliefs upon the way in which I express myself or dress. In terms of practice, it is important that teachers understand that students may conceptualize them this way so that they further explore political/moral understandings with their students. Even more importantly, teacher practice will be better informed if teachers understand that their physical being, including dress, may be inscribed with political/moral meanings for their students.


A principal objective of this research is to provide greater understanding of the complex ways that teacher dress practices and discourses about them serve to mediate personal, popular and State ideologies of the purpose and meaning of being a teacher, teaching and the teaching profession. It is hoped that research provides a response to who have criticized teacher dress as being 'unprofessional' by shedding light upon the complex ways that teachers conceptualize their dress practices for work. Moreover, it is hoped that this study furthers discussions about schools as socializing spaces in which the teacher body and appearance are no longer viewed as static 'instruments' by which to extend state control over students' minds and bodies, but rather can be viewed as

part of the discourse about the diversity that teachers bring into the classroom. Ultimately, it is hoped that this study will help raise understanding that there are a variety of ways of “looking like” a teacher, and that in examining these and conceptualizations that underlie their construction, teachers can gain insight into how they interpret and enact their work as teachers.

Teachers are more than just the images that we present to students, teachers, administrators and others outside of education. This study hopefully has shown that our physical appearance is interpreted in a variety of ways by students and others whether we wish them to be or not. In the end, it is hoped that this study has demonstrated that reflecting upon our physical appearance in our work as teachers can enable us to become more thorough and honest in our investigation of the complexity of teaching in urban public schools and beyond.

## APPENDIX I

Item #2 of the Annual Professional Performance Review form list "personal appearance" as the second evaluation criterion. This particular form has been in use since 1989.



**NEW YORK CITY DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION**  
 DIVISION OF HUMAN RESOURCES  
 OFFICE OF APPEALS AND REVIEWS  
 65 Court Street, Brooklyn, New York 11201  
 BE/DOP 8956B (5/87) pers d1 (Replaces OP 118)

**ANNUAL PROFESSIONAL PERFORMANCE REVIEW AND REPORT ON PROBATIONARY SERVICE OF PEDAGOGICAL EMPLOYEE**  
(OTHER THAN SUPERVISOR, GUIDANCE COUNSELOR, SCHOOL SOCIAL WORKER, PSYCHOLOGIST, EDUCATIONAL EVALUATOR, SCHOOL SECRETARY)

EMPLOYEE'S FULL NAME		LICENSE		FILE NUMBER		
EMPLOYEE'S COMPLETE HOME ADDRESS (Number and Street)			APT. NO.	SOCIAL SECURITY NUMBER		
CITY		STATE	ZIP CODE	TENURED	PROBATIONER	SUBSTITUTE
CURRENT SALARY RATE \$	FOR PROBATIONERS: Date of Appointment		Jerome Credit	NYS. Tenure Credit (Max. 1 year)	Date of Completion of Probation	
SCHOOL	BOROUGH		DISTRICT			

	FIRST YEAR				SECOND YEAR				THIRD YEAR				DAYS IN C.A.R.	OR BORROWED DAYS	SUBSTITUTE SERVICE NO. OF DAYS	
	TIMES NO.	TIME LOST			TIMES NO.	TIME LOST			TIMES NO.	TIME LOST						
		DAYS	HRS.	MIN.		DAYS	HRS.	MIN.		DAYS	HRS.	MIN.				
<b>LATENESS*</b>																
<b>ABSENCE*</b> <small>Exclude Non-Attendance</small>																

\* NOTE: For reports on probationers complete 1 to 3 years as applicable. For all other personnel use "First Year" to denote current year.

**SECTION 1 - REPORT BY PRINCIPAL OR OTHER APPROPRIATE SUPERVISOR:**

COMMENTS (as checked. "NA" indicates "Not Applicable.")	SATIS-FACTORY	UNSATIS-FACTORY	ADDITIONAL COMMENTS
<b>A. PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL QUALITIES</b>			
1. Attendance and punctuality			
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 2. Personal appearance			
3. Voice, speech and use of English			
4. Professional attitude and professional growth			
5. Resourcefulness and initiative			
<b>B. PUPIL GUIDANCE AND INSTRUCTION</b>			
1. Effect on character and personality growth of pupils			
2. Control of class			
3. Maintenance of wholesome classroom atmosphere			
4. Planning and preparation of work			
5. Skill in adapting instruction to individual needs and capacities			
6. Effective use of appropriate methods and techniques			
7. Skill in making class lessons interesting to pupils			
8. Extent of pupil participation in the class and school program			
9. Evidence of pupil growth in knowledge, skills, appreciations and attitude			
10. Attention to pupil health, safety and general welfare			
<b>C. CLASSROOM OR SHOP MANAGEMENT</b>			
1. Attention to physical conditions			
2. Housekeeping and appearance of room			
3. Care of equipment by teacher and children			
4. Attention to records and reports			
5. Attention to routine matters			
<b>D. PARTICIPATION IN SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY ACTIVITIES</b>			
1. Maintenance of good relations with other teachers and with supervisors			
2. Effort to establish and maintain good relationships with parents			
3. Willingness to accept special assignments in connection with the school program			
<b>E. ADDITIONAL REMARKS (additional sheets, signed and acknowledged may be attached):</b>			

## APPENDIX II

### *News/Magazine Articles 1984 – February 2006 that Address the Teacher Dress Issue*

- Aguilar, Alexa. 2005. Teacher attire doesn't go unnoticed: more districts in U.S. are adopting dress codes for faculty members. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, October 3, 2005, Metro, C4.
- Bridges, Linda. 1994. Should schools have strict dress codes for staff? We've been dressing ourselves for years, thank you. *American Teacher*, November 1994, 6.
- Buchanan, Bruce. 2005. Teachers face test: dress to impress. *News & Record*, August 27, 2005, A1.
- Cuneo, Robin. 2005. Harbor Creek Township, PA, tells teachers how to suit up, too. *Erie Times-News*, August 27, 2005, E1.
- Douban, Gigi. 2005. Dress code for teachers eyed. *Birmingham News*, May 25, 2005, 1B.
- Editorial. 2005. Teachers provide a model for professional appearance. *News & Record*, August 30, 2005, A6.
- Elrod, Eileen. 2006. Should teachers wear business attire to school?: no. *NEA Today* 24 (5):45.
- Feller, Ben. 2006. *Forget midterms, how about midriffs?* National Association of Secondary School Principals 2005 [cited February 1 2006]. Available from [http://www.principal.org/s\\_nassp/sec\\_IllumenList.asp?CID=391&DID=52002](http://www.principal.org/s_nassp/sec_IllumenList.asp?CID=391&DID=52002).
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- Miller, Patrick W. 2005. Body language in the classroom. *Techniques: Connecting Education to Careers* 80 (8):28 - 30.
- Million, June. 2004. Dress codes for teachers? *Education Digest* 69 (5).
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- Parker, Barbara. 1989. Dress the part if we expect the status. *American Teacher*, November 1989, 4.
- Purdy, Kevin. 2004. 2 teachers wearing jeans removed from classes. *The Buffalo News*, April 24, 2004.
- Ramirez, Eddie. 2005. Teachers' jeans no class act? *Citrus Times; Hernando Times*, 1.
- Reeder, Ernestine N. and Anita C. King. 1984. Are teachers dressing for success? *Illinois Teacher of Home Economics*, May/June 1984, 212-213.
- Samuel, Yvonne. 2005. Teachers will help start dress code: they will wear "business casual" to give Hazelwood students a preview of what is expected. *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*, August 15, 2005, 1.
- Sanders, Bob Ray. 2006. A few more rules would be good for schools. *Fort Worth Star-Telegram*, January 20, 2006.
- Should schools have strict dress codes for staff? 1994. *American Teacher*, November 1994, 6.
- Should schools set dress codes for teachers? 1989. *American Teacher*, November 1989, 4.
- Simmons, Betty Jo. 1996. Teachers should dress for success. *The Clearing House* 69 (May/June).
- Sternberg, Ruth E. 2003. Attending to teacher attire. *School Administrator* 60 (2).
- Van Mullekom, Kathy 2006. Wardrobes given to teachers recovering from hurricanes. *Chattanooga Times Free Press*, February 24, E4.
- Waggoner, Charles. 2002. Blue denim blues. *School Administrator* 59 (2).
- Waters, Ray. 2006. Should teachers wear business attire to school?: yes. *NEA Today* 24 (5):45.
- Westmore, Paul. 2004. Conduct code rescinded amid apparel issues. *The Buffalo News*, October 14, 2004, B3.

## APPENDIX III

<b>Participant Teacher Questionnaire</b>				
<b>1. Select or write a description of yourself in terms of ethnicity, race or cultural background.</b>				
Black	White	Latino/a	Asian	Other: Please describe
<b>2. Select or write a description of your gender.</b>				
Female	Male	Gay	Bisexual	Other: Please describe
<b>3. Select or write a description of your marital status.</b>				
Single	Married	Other: Please describe		
<b>4. What is your age? (If you prefer not to answer, please leave blank.)</b>				
<b>5. What subject(s) do you currently teach?</b>				
<b>6. What is the total numbers of years you have been teaching (including this one)?</b>				
<b>7. Select or describe your political orientation.</b>				
Conservative	Liberal	Other: Please describe		
<b>8. Select a description of the dress style that BEST articulates your own or write a name for and description of your own.</b>				
<p>These descriptions are not intended to be descriptive of what everything that you actually wear, but list clothing items that YOU consider ACCEPTABLE for the work teachers do.</p> <p>You will have opportunities later to explain your response with the researcher.</p>				
<i>Casual</i>	<i>Conservative</i>	<i>Business</i>	<i>Ethnic</i>	<i>Other</i> (Please name and describe)
Jeans of any kind or color; Tee-shirts with or without printing on them; sneakers.	None of the items listed in "Casual" or "Ethnic"; Not necessarily as strict as "business."	Suit; jacket and tie for men; jacket and blouse for women. None of the items listed for "Casual" or "Ethnic."	Garments or clothing made of fabrics that are identifiably non-Western (sari, dashiki, fez, etc.)	

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