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## ABSTRACT

This study examined the effect of the gender specific aspects of a child's clothing and a child's sex on the type of interaction that occurred between the child and the teacher. A stratified random sample of second graders, including urban (n=104), suburban (n=77), and rural (n=49) districts, was used, drawing on two classes from each of six school districts. Principals and teachers were told that the purpose of the study was to observe children's clothing practices and their interactions during class. No mention was made concerning the teacher's interaction with the child. Sex and gender aspects of clothing were found to be related to teacher student interaction. Male and female children who were dressed in a unisex manner were the most likely to experience positive interaction while those dressed in the most gender specific manner were the most likely to experience reproof. In keeping with the findings of previous studies, male students rated significantly higher than female students in interaction with their teacher. (Contains 2 tables and 17 references.) (BT)

# Gender Specific Aspects of Children's Clothing and Teacher-Student Interaction.

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1 **Gender Specific Aspects of Children's Clothing and Teacher-**  
2 **Student Interaction**

3 *Abstract*

4 *The study examined the effect of the gender specific aspects of*  
5 *child's clothing and the child's gender on the type of interaction which*  
6 *occurred between the child and the teacher. Both gender and clothing*  
7 *were found to be related to teacher student interaction. Male and female*  
8 *children who were dressed in a unisex manner were the most likely to*  
9 *experience positive interaction while those dressed in the most gender*  
10 *specific manner were the most likely to experience reproof. In keeping*  
11 *with the findings of previous studies male students were significantly*  
12 *higher in interaction with their teacher than were female students.*

13  
14 **Key Words:** teacher-student interaction, gendered clothing, perception.

15  
16 Clothing has a significant influence on the manner in which we are  
17 perceived by others. Perception of appearance is central to the evaluation  
18 of abilities, personality, traits, and activities by other people. How teachers  
19 perceive students and form expectations of their capabilities and potential  
20 can have a major influence on a child's subsequent development. The  
21 purpose of the study was to examine the relationship between gender  
22 specific aspects of the child's clothing and the nature of interaction which  
23 occurred between the child and the teacher.

24 This research builds on well documented research findings that  
25 teachers treat male and female students differently. Boys receive more  
26 attention, detailed instruction, educational opportunities to succeed, and  
27 praise than girls (Serbin, O'Leary, Kent, and Tonick, 1973). Brophy and  
28 Good (1970) found evidence of differential behavior by teachers toward

1 students which could not be objectively attributed to student differences.  
2 They suggested that differences were related to teacher expectations.  
3 Other researchers, Behling and Williams (1991), found that perception of a  
4 model's dress in photographs was significantly related to assessment of  
5 intelligence. This research was important to increased understanding of  
6 assessment of student abilities because it addressed variation in  
7 assessment of intelligence based on dress rather than on gender or other  
8 demographic characteristics. Researchers have indicated that the  
9 expectations which teachers have for male students have a significant  
10 affect on their academic performance and long range career success and  
11 that limited interaction negatively affects female students' learning  
12 opportunities (Clarcken, 1995). Better understanding of this gender based  
13 stereotypical reaction by teachers can be significant in the education of  
14 teachers to become less stereotypical in their attitudes and behavior  
15 toward students. The primary objective of this study was to increase  
16 knowledge of the impact of the child's clothing as related to classroom  
17 interaction.

18 Previous work has relied on the use of photographs of high school  
19 age models rather than students in a classroom situation. Clothing is an  
20 important cue in person perception and is influential in determining  
21 interaction between people. The interaction which young children  
22 experience in the classroom influences their future academic success. If  
23 the clothing which the child is wearing affects this interaction, educators  
24 need to be aware. Considerable attention has been given to the influence  
25 of gender on teacher student interaction and school districts have  
26 implemented programs to help teachers become more gender equitable in  
27 their instruction. Increased understanding of the language of clothing can  
28 further assist teachers in effectively working with all children.

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### **Clothing and Teacher Student Interaction**

Behling and Williams (1991), in examining the relationship between perception and intelligence, academic achievement and clothing style, found significant differences in perception of intelligence and scholastic ability based on clothing styles and gender of models shown in photographs. When models wearing four different clothing styles were shown to teachers, male models were perceived as more intelligent and to have higher academic achievement than female models regardless of the clothing style shown. Several other studies, using a variety of age groups, have demonstrated that appearance is related to differences in expectations for behavior (Cahill, 1989; Joffe, 1971; & Kaiser, 1989).

Johnson and Workman (1993) studied impressions of preschool children's competencies and likelihood that the children would engage in sex-typed behaviors. Female children were more likely to be encouraged to play with dolls or play house when they were dressed in clothing which the author's classed as feminine while female children dressed in jeans and t-shirts were more likely to be encouraged to play with blocks and other non-gender associated play activities. Teachers who held sex-role stereotypes were more likely to encourage girls to engage in feminine activities than teachers who did not hold sex-role stereotypes.

### **Gender and Teacher-Student Interaction**

Research in the area of gender-equity has shown that expectations are different for boys and girls. Teachers treat children differently on the basis of gender and are not aware of doing so; teachers have been found to give male students longer to answer questions and to be more affirming of the response than they are of female students (Adams, 1978; Fagot, 1981;

1 & Sadker and Sadker, 1972). Teachers interact more frequently with male  
2 students and to have higher expectations for their intellectual capabilities  
3 (Behling and Williams, 1991). Higher quality interaction has been  
4 observed with students from whom teachers have higher expectations  
5 (Sadker and Sadker, 1994). The gender of the child is of paramount  
6 influence on the nature of teacher student interaction (Serbin, O'Leary,  
7 Kent, and Tonick, 1973).

8 Research by Feldhusen and Willard-Holt (1993) indicated that bright  
9 boys ask more questions than bright girls. However, teachers were not  
10 found to reprimand bright girls from calling out answers. These findings  
11 were contrary to the findings of Callahan (1980) indicating that girls are  
12 encouraged to more docile behavior than boys.

13 In a study of children's day care experiences, Clawson (1997) found  
14 that boys receive more control interactions than girls but that girls receive  
15 more overall interactions. She suggested that boys were more likely to  
16 behave in ways which elicited controlling behavior. This finding is  
17 contrary to earlier studies indicating that boys experienced more total  
18 interaction than girls (Sadker and Sadker, 1972).

19 Based on the review of literature, the researcher hypothesized that  
20 both the gender of the child and the gender characteristics of the child's  
21 clothing would affect the type of interaction which occurs

## 22 **Sample Selection and Profile**

23 Second grade children were selected because previous research on  
24 clothing as related to teacher perception of student capabilities was done  
25 with high school age students. If clothing affects teacher's assessment of  
26 high school student capabilities and potential, it is important to examine  
27 the potential affect of clothing for other age groups as well.

1 A stratified random sample, to include urban, suburban, and rural  
2 districts, was used which included two classes from each of six school  
3 districts. All children who were present the day of the observation were  
4 included in the study. One hundred four (45%) of the participants were  
5 from urban schools, 77 (33%) came from suburban schools and 49 (21%)  
6 from a rural school district. One hundred nineteen of the participants were  
7 male (52%) and 111 (48%) were female. In terms of race 73% were  
8 Caucasian, 19% were African American, 6% were Asian, and 2% were  
9 Hispanic.

## 10 **Data Collection**

11 Principals and teachers were told that the purpose of the study was  
12 to observe children's clothing practices and their interaction during a  
13 regular class period. No mention was made to the principal or the teacher  
14 concerning the teacher's interaction with the child.

15 Each classroom was observed one time for a total of two minutes per  
16 child in the class. Observation time was controlled to allow equal  
17 observation time for classrooms differing in class size. Most classes  
18 included twenty children and consequently were observed for a total of  
19 forty minutes.

20 The graduate students requested a class list upon arrival, prepared  
21 name tags for the students and recorded the student's names on the  
22 observation forms. One graduate student recorded the gender specific  
23 aspects of the child's clothing, the child's gender, and the child's perceived  
24 ethnicity while the second graduate student recorded interaction between  
25 the child and the teacher. One graduate student always categorized the  
26 child's clothing while the other recorded the teacher child interaction.

## 27 **Measurement of Variables**

1           *Clothing.* The gender specific characteristics of the child's clothing  
2 was classified into four categories: unisex, minimally gender specific,  
3 moderately gender specific, and extremely gender specific.

4           Categories of clothing were defined by the researchers following  
5 exploratory observation and discussion of the type of clothing customarily  
6 worn by school age children. Preliminary observation indicated that most  
7 children wear clothing with few gender designations. A list of style  
8 features which were observed on children's clothing was developed and  
9 those which applied to one gender and not the other were listed as gender  
10 specific.

11           Clothing and adornment classed as unisex included items which by  
12 virtue of color and/or style could appropriately be worn by either gender  
13 in our society at this point in time. Clothing such as sweaters, t-shirts and  
14 blue jeans were considered to be Unisex. Minimally gender specific  
15 clothing were outfits with one gender specific item or decorative detail  
16 which made the clothing more appropriate for one gender. For female  
17 children peter pan collars, the color pink, ruffles, lace, tucks, shirring,  
18 ribbons, skirts, Mary Jane shoes, tights, etc. were considered to be feminine  
19 items of clothing. For male children military fatigues, sports team logo  
20 apparel, rough, heavy fabrics, plaid flannel shirts, heavy work boots, dark  
21 intense colors, etc. were classified as masculine.

22           The moderately gender specific clothing included wearing clothing or  
23 adornment which included two to three gender specific items, and the  
24 extreme gender specific clothing category included wearing of four or more  
25 items which would not generally be worn by members of the opposite sex.

26           *Teacher-student Interaction.* Interaction included all interchange,  
27 verbal and physical, between the teacher and the child whether it be of a  
28 positive, neutral or negative nature. Positive interaction included all



1 exchanges which reflected a favorable attitude on the part of the teacher  
2 including responses to questions, questioning the child, giving information,  
3 giving verbal and/or physical comfort, or aiding in an activity. Positive  
4 interactions were helpful, instructive, encouraging, and positive in manner.  
5 Interactions which were neutral in nature was recorded as positive  
6 because the child was recognized and given attention. Negative  
7 interactions with the child, reproof, were classified as interactions in which  
8 the teacher's attitude was negative, ignoring, reprimanding, or critical of  
9 the child. Total interaction was the combination of positive interaction and  
10 reproof.

## 11 **Results**

### 12 **Total Interaction.**

13 The relationship found between total teacher child interaction and  
14 the gendered aspects of the child's clothing was not statistically significant,  
15  $F[3,226]=1.632$ . Table I reports the relationship between the teacher-child  
16 interaction and the child's clothing. Analysis of variance on total  
17 interaction indicated the main effect to be the gender of the child,  
18  $F[1,228]=9.937^{***}$ . Male children ( $M=4.487$ ,  $SD=3.427$ ) experienced  
19 significantly more total interaction than female children ( $M=3.189$ ,  
20  $SD=2.755$ ).

### 21 **Positive Interaction.**

22 Gender was also found to be the main effect on positive interaction,  
23  $F[1,205]=5.389^{**}$ . Boys ( $M=4.125$ ,  $SD=2.929$ ) were more likely to interact  
24 positively with their teachers than were girls ( $M=3.274$ ,  $SD=2.224$ ).

25 The gender specific aspect of the child's clothing was also found to be  
26 significantly related to positive interaction,  $F[3,203]=2.764^*$ . Children  
27 dressed in a unisex manner ( $M=4.560$ ,  $SD=3.315$ ) had higher levels of  
28 positive interaction than those dressed in minimum gender ( $M=3.762$ ,

1 SD=2.570), moderate gender (M=3.192, SD=2.145), or extreme gender  
2 (M=3.688, SD=2.522) clothing. Fisher's PLSD tests indicated that children  
3 dressed in a unisex manner experienced significantly more positive  
4 interaction than those dressed in a moderate gender manner. See Table I.

5 Analysis of males only (Table II) indicated that clothing tended to be  
6 related,  $F[3,108]=2.547$ , to positive interaction. Boys dressed in a unisex  
7 manner (M=4.765, SD=3.267) were more likely to interact positively with  
8 their teacher than those dressed in either a moderate (M=3.190, SD=2.350)  
9 or minimum (M=4.742, SD=2.966) gender manner when examined using  
10 Fisher's PLSD test. For female children no significant relationships were  
11 found between positive interaction and the gendered aspects of their  
12 clothing,  $F[3,91]=1.369$ .

### 13 **Reproof.**

14 The child's clothing was significantly related to the level of reproof  
15 which they experienced,  $F(3,65)=3.280^*$ . Children dressed in an extremely  
16 gender (M=2.714, SD=1.254) specific manner were the most likely to  
17 receive reproof while those dressed in a unisex (M=1.385, SD=.650)  
18 manner were least likely. Fisher's PLSD test indicated that children  
19 dressed in an extremely gender specific manner received significantly  
20 more reproof than children dressed in a unisex, minimum, or moderately  
21 gender specific manner. See Table I.

22 Analysis of female children only indicated that girls wearing  
23 extremely (M=3.667, SD=1.155) gendered clothing experienced reproof  
24 significantly more often,  $F(3,19)=3.852^*$ , than those wearing unisex  
25 (M=2.000, SD=1.414), minimally gendered (M=1.727, SD=1.191), or  
26 moderately gendered (M=1.286, SD=.488) clothing. . Among male children  
27 gender specific clothing was not significantly,  $F(3,42)=.791$ , related to level  
28 of reproof. However, for both male and female children, the highest levels

1 of reproof were experienced by those wearing extremely gendered  
2 clothing.

### 3 **Discussion**

4       The findings of the study support the hypothesis that teacher  
5 student interaction and clothing are related. This finding is consistent  
6 with the findings of other researchers that teachers interact with children  
7 differently. Previous research has indicated that differences in interaction  
8 are significantly related to gender of the child (Baker, 1986; Feldhusen and  
9 Willard Holt, 1993; Jones and Wheatly, 1990). Other research has shown  
10 that expectations for play behavior are related to type of clothing worn  
11 (Johnson and Workman, 1993). Findings of this study indicate that  
12 differences in behavior on the part of the teacher are related not only to  
13 gender but also related to the type of clothing worn.

14       The dominant characteristic in explaining why teachers react more to  
15 some children than others is their gender. However, findings indicated  
16 that children who dressed in extremely gendered clothing such as military  
17 fatigues for boys or ruffles for girls were more likely to be subject to  
18 reproof than children dressed in unisex or minimally gendered clothing.

19       Children dress in a manner which is expressive of their values,  
20 interest, personality. They are showing others who they are. Of course,  
21 the type of clothing which children wear is influenced by the  
22 parents/guardians, siblings, and peers. For second grade children the  
23 influence of family is stronger than the influence of peers. What children  
24 choose to wear is a combination of what is available, what they are allowed  
25 to wear, and what they want to wear. The child expresses about him/her  
26 self through their clothing. Does the little girl in the frilly dress have a  
27 different self concept than the little girl in jeans and a sweat shirt? Does  
28 the manner of dress impact how children act individually or in groups?

1 Some educators feel that clothing affects classroom behavior and institute  
2 rules to control perceived negative aspects of appearance.

3 This study was concerned with how the teacher reacted to the child  
4 related to the child's appearance. It is not possible to separate the  
5 intervening variables of gender, the teacher's previous experience with the  
6 child, and the child's expression of self through clothing. Does the teacher  
7 react differently to children because of the way they look?

8 Additional research is needed on characteristics of the child which  
9 influence clothing choices and the type of gender equity training the  
10 teacher may have experienced. Children dressed in unisex clothing  
11 received the most total and positive interaction while children dressed in  
12 extremely gendered clothing experienced significantly more reproof.  
13 Perhaps the teacher felt that their clothing was inappropriate or their  
14 clothing may have been an attention getting device. No information was  
15 collected which examined the selection process related to the child's  
16 clothing.

17 Clothing influences the perception which others have of a child's  
18 personality, capabilities, potential. This study indicates that teachers  
19 interact with children differently based on their clothing. Because the  
20 expectations of teachers in their interaction with children has been shown  
21 to be critical to the educational experience of the child, the finding that  
22 teacher's interaction is related to the gender specific aspects of the child's  
23 clothing is critical in further understanding of the dynamics of teacher  
24 student interaction.

25

**Table I. ANOVA for Teacher Student Interaction as Related to Child's Clothing and Gender. n=230**

|                 | Interaction  |       |                 |       |                |       |
|-----------------|--------------|-------|-----------------|-------|----------------|-------|
|                 | <u>Total</u> |       | <u>Positive</u> |       | <u>Reproof</u> |       |
|                 | Mean         | SD    | Mean            | SD    | Mean           | SD    |
| <b>Clothing</b> |              |       |                 |       |                |       |
| Unisex          | 4.556        | 3.790 | 4.560           | 3.315 | 1.385          | .650  |
| Minimum Gender  | 3.875        | 3.189 | 3.762           | 2.570 | 1.750          | 1.189 |
| Moderate Gender | 3.353        | 2.599 | 3.192           | 2.145 | 1.440          | .917  |
| Extreme Gender  | 4.105        | 3.478 | 3.688           | 2.522 | 2.714          | 1.254 |
| F               | 1.632        |       | 2.764*          |       | 3.280*         |       |
| <b>Gender</b>   |              |       |                 |       |                |       |
| male            | 4.487        | 3.427 | 4.125           | 2.929 | 1.565          | .981  |
| female          | 3.189        | 2.755 | 3.274           | 2.224 | 1.870          | 1.217 |
| F               | 9.937***     |       | 5.389**         |       | 1.254          |       |

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

**Table II. ANOVA for Type of Teacher Student Interaction as Related to Child's Gender and Clothing. n=230**

| Total Interaction |             |       |               |       |
|-------------------|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| <u>Clothing</u>   | <u>Male</u> |       | <u>Female</u> |       |
|                   | Mean        | SD    | Mean          | SD    |
| Unisex            | 5.029       | 3.626 | 3.684         | 4.028 |
| Minimum Gender    | 5.152       | 3.615 | 2.795         | 2.319 |
| Moderate Gender   | 3.659       | 2.877 | 3.024         | 2.253 |
| Extreme Gender    | 3.857       | 4.220 | 4.250         | 3.166 |
| F                 | 1.668       |       | 1.116         |       |

  

| Positive Interaction |             |       |               |       |
|----------------------|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| <u>Clothing</u>      | <u>Male</u> |       | <u>Female</u> |       |
|                      | Mean        | SD    | Mean          | SD    |
| Unisex               | 4.765       | 3.267 | 4.125         | 3.481 |
| Minimum Gender       | 4.742       | 2.966 | 2.812         | 1.674 |
| Moderate Gender      | 3.190       | 2.350 | 3.194         | 1.910 |
| Extreme Gender       | 3.800       | 3.421 | 3.636         | 2.203 |
| F                    | 2.547       |       | 1.369         |       |

  

| Reproof Interaction |             |       |               |       |
|---------------------|-------------|-------|---------------|-------|
| <u>Clothing</u>     | <u>Male</u> |       | <u>Female</u> |       |
|                     | Mean        | SD    | Mean          | SD    |
| Unisex              | 1.273       | .467  | 2.000         | 1.414 |
| Minimum Gender      | 1.769       | 1.235 | 1.727         | 1.191 |
| Moderate Gender     | 1.500       | 1.043 | 1.286         | .488  |
| Extreme Gender      | 2.000       | .816  | 3.667         | 1.155 |
| F                   | .791        |       | 3.852*        |       |

\*p≤.05, \*\*p≤.01, \*\*\*p≤.001

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