

An Exploration of How Attire Shapes High School Students' Perceptions of Agriculture Teachers

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Abstract

An individual's attire sends messages to those who view them (Damhorst, 1990), and the clothing choices made by teachers may influence students' perceptions of the school (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). A majority of teacher dress codes require formal clothing (Workman & Freeburg, 2010); however, agricultural education teachers often work in educational environments which are more work-oriented than the traditional classroom (Shoulders & Myers, 2012). This qualitative study explored students' perceptions of agriculture teachers based on their attire. Participants were shown an image of a teacher in attire ranging from casual to formal and asked questions about the teacher's knowledge, discipline, respect, and ability to relate to students. Participants' perceptions were similar regarding the formally and informally dressed general education teacher, but differed based on their involvement with the school's agriculture program when viewing formally and informally dressed agriculture teachers. These findings suggest that while agriculture teachers' attire may influence students' perceptions of the teacher, the manner in which the attire shapes those perceptions may differ based on students' experiences in agricultural education.

Keywords: Agricultural education, teacher attire, student perceptions

Introduction

While clothing has been used to provide comfort, protection, and modesty (Aiken, 1963; Morris, 1977), "it is impossible to wear clothes without transmitting social signals" (Morris, 1977, p. 213). Clothing is an impactful method of communication and allows the wearer to intentionally or unintentionally adhere to or stray from cultural traditions, represent a specific role or authority, and display an acquisition of status (Gordon, Tengler, & Infante, 1982; Damhorst, Miller-Spillman, & Michelman, 2005). In educational settings, a teacher's clothing choice influences students' impressions of the teacher and class (Workman & Freeburg, 2009), and can even impact supervising teachers' impressions of student teachers (Kelsey, 2006).

Regardless of subject matter, what to wear in the classroom is one of the first influential decisions every teacher makes each day. A synthesis of dress and impression formation studies by Damhorst (1990) concluded that an individual's dress sends numerous and complex messages to perceivers. Clothing is one of the first attributes a person may notice about another individual, a

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principle that readily applies itself to the classroom. Teacher attire is often treated as a reflection of the school where the teacher is employed (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). Numerous studies have shown that formally dressed teachers gain more credibility than their informally dressed counterparts (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). School administrators have also identified formal attire on teachers as more appropriate than informal attire (Fitch, 1984).

The importance of one's choice of clothing is not a notion exclusive to teachers of core academic subjects; Gordon's (2010) survey of Career and Technical Education (CTE) supervisors found that over 94% of respondents said "attire does affect the professionalism of secondary teachers" (p. 55). However, the roles and responsibilities of the agriculture teacher differ considerably from those of other teachers, and include regularly facilitating student learning in "mechanics laboratories, greenhouses, livestock facilities, land laboratories, and aquaculture laboratories" (Shoulders & Myers, 2012, p. 124). Agricultural education has historically maintained traditions of teaching work-specific skills to students in these realistic learning environments (Hyslop-Margison, 2000), which may lead agriculture teachers to model clothing traditions of these settings—durable, casual, and appropriate for the specific learning environment. This contrast in expectations of attire could impact impressions of students, teachers, and administrators about the credibility of the agriculture teacher, perhaps in conflicting ways. Gordon (2010) recommended that "qualitative research targeting CTE students and their parents' perceptions of secondary teachers' attire should be done" (p. 59).

Conceptual Framework

There have been numerous studies conducted on the role of teacher attire in forming impressions about teachers. Most school systems maintain dress codes, with nearly 97% prohibiting attire that is "inappropriate for [the] position or daily activity of an educator" (Workman & Freeburg, 2010, p. 13). Inappropriate dress has been defined by most media materials as attire that is casual, sexually revealing, or in violation of conventional norms (Freeburg & Workman, 2010).

One of the many outcomes for which teacher attire makes a difference is student perceptions of the teacher. This outcome has been studied multiple times at the secondary (Butler & Roesel, 1989, 1991) and post-secondary levels (Carr, Lavin, & Davies, 2009; Dougher & Gough, 2006; Gorham, Cohen, & Morris, 1999). Interestingly, "the same formal clothing that serves to increase perceptions of credibility, intelligence, and competence, and to increase compliance, has been reported to have the effect of decreasing perceptions of likability or approachability" (Morris, Gorham, Cohen, & Huffman, 1996, p. 137). Butler and Roesel's (1989) study of high school students' perceptions of teachers' clothing choices yielded the observation that a theoretical teacher dressed in jeans was the preferred teacher among students, even though the participants rated such a teacher as not well respected, knowledgeable, or teacher-like in appearance. A study of college student perceptions found that increased casualness of attire was associated with decreased ratings of competence (Morris, Gorham, Cohen, & Huffman, 1996). Lukavsky, Butler, and Harden (1995) and Carr et al. (2009) came to similar results, reporting that an instructor dressed in an informal clothing style—a sweater and jeans—was rated by students as approachable and flexible but not well-respected. At the opposite end of the spectrum, a teacher wearing a suit was viewed as the most teacher-like but the least preferred option by students (Butler & Roesel, 1989). Sebastian and Bristow (2008) reached similar conclusions when they found that professors in formal dress were considered more knowledgeable but were also not as well liked by students. In examining a different dimension of student perceptions, Roach (1997) found that students reported an increased likelihood of misbehaving in classes where the TA was dressed more casually.

While teachers' dress codes are intended for all employed as such within the school system, the teaching environments, and subsequently perhaps the appropriate attire, can vary considerably. First and foremost, agriculture teachers are school-employed teachers and are typically expected to adhere to employee dress codes, the majority of which require "professional dress and appearance" (Workman & Freeburg, 2010, p. 13). However, the facilities in which they teach represent industries in which traditional, formal teaching attire may not be common, leading teachers to select other, more common styles of dress. Additionally, in traditionally male-dominated teaching disciplines such as agricultural education, females' sartorial choices can impact other teachers' impressions of working with the entire female population (Kelsey, 2006).

Agricultural education is not the only discipline where conflicting sartorial expectations may exist. Studies in physical education, another subject that regularly makes use of settings outside the traditional classroom, found that the teacher's attire should align with the occupational attributes expected of a leader in that setting (Gordon, 2010); "the clothing worn by a teacher in physical education must fit that of a person who is prepared to engage in physical activity or children may perceive the teacher as uncaring toward the subject area, not prepared to demonstrate the skills, and/or disinterested in engaging in physical activities" (Bradford, Hickson, & Evaniev, 2014, p. 20-21).

While attire is important, it is not the sole determining factor in how a teacher is perceived. Dougher and Gough's (2006) survey of students in a college of agriculture indicated that students rated method of presentation as more important than instructor attire. Gorham et al. (1999) found that instructor attire had far less influence on student perceptions than did teacher immediacy, and the researchers came to a final conclusion that student perceptions of teacher approachability and credibility were ultimately influenced much more by the behaviors of the instructor than the instructor's attire. However, the difference in the clothing expected in agricultural facilities and traditional classrooms, combined with the influence clothing does have on stakeholders' impressions of teachers, suggests research should be conducted in an effort to appropriately guide agriculture teachers in their sartorial choices.

Theoretical Framework

Qualitative research utilizes theory to conceptualize and guide the focus of a study rather than to support or refute findings (Flick, 2006). The theoretical framework of this study is based on the expectancy violations theory, which states that both societal and individual expectations contribute to perceptions of those whose behavior deviates from cultural expectations (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). Teachers are expected to be competent in educating others. Additionally, societal norms lead students to expect teachers to dress with a "moderate degree of formality" (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012, p. 3). Violations of these expectancies, such as overly formal or informal attire, can draw attention due to their novelty (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). How that attention is directed can vary; violations of expectations may cause individuals to pay closer attention to the message being communicated by the violator (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). Therefore, "there are circumstances under which violations of social norms and expectations may be a superior strategy to conformity" (Burgoon & Hale, 1988, p. 58). How the violation is perceived by audience members can vary with the communicator's reward level. A teacher with a high reward level, for example, delivers more positively valued messages, while those with low reward levels deliver more negatively valued messages (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). The sartorial violations committed by the teacher can also be interpreted as positive or negative. In combination, the teacher's reward level and polarity of violation determine the positivity or negativity of outcomes stemming from the violation (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). For example, if an agriculture teacher has a high reward level and commits a positive violation of expectancy, possibly through clothing choice, the students will, theoretically,

pay more attention to the violation and interpret it more positively (Dunbar & Segrin, 2012). However, if the agriculture teacher has a low reward level, an expectancy violation is more likely to produce more negative outcomes.

The societal expectations of teacher attire suggest formal, conservative clothing as an appropriate choice. Alternately, societal expectations of agricultural workers suggest more casual attire as appropriate for the setting. Agriculture teachers who dress for the classroom but teach in agricultural facilities violate the societal expectations of appropriate attire for those settings; however, agriculture teachers who dress as though they are agriculturalists rather than teachers violate the societal expectations of appropriate attire for teachers. The study at hand was guided by this theoretical standpoint, understanding that students' perceptions of agriculture teachers are, at least in part, shaped by the teachers' clothing, and that their individual expectations of agriculture teachers may play a role in whether they viewed formal or informal attire as a violation of their sartorial expectations of agriculture teachers.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to describe how students' perceptions of agriculture teachers was shaped by the teachers' attire, based on their expectations of the dress of teachers in general and agriculture teachers specifically. The following research questions guided the study:

1. Do students view the more formal attire expected of teachers as a violation of their expectations of the agriculture teacher? If so, are these violations viewed positively or negatively?
2. Do students' expectations of the agriculture teacher deviate enough from their expectations of other teachers to lead to an expectation of different attire?

Methods

The subjects for this study were high school students in two high schools in [County, State]. The two high schools were selected in order to allow for source triangulation (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999). While both schools were located in the same county, School A was located in a suburban community while School B was located in a rural community. School A had two male agriculture teachers while School B had one male and one female agriculture teacher. Additionally, each school contained students who were enrolled in agriculture classes, were not enrolled but were aware of agriculture classes, and were not aware of the school's agriculture program. Students were exposed to photographs of confederates in different types of dress (Morris et al., 1996). Focused interviews were conducted with high school students to gather their perceptions of the confederates as teachers. Interviews were recorded, transcribed, and analyzed for themes using the constant comparative method.

Design of the Study

The method used in this study to examine clothing effects was adapted from studies by Butler and Roesel (1991) and Morris et al. (1996). A set of sixteen photographs of trained experimental confederates was used to prompt the participants. The confederates used were of different genders (male and female) and age (20s and 40s) and were previously unknown to the participants, as "the effect of clothing manipulations has been shown to be affected by subjects' knowing research confederates prior to an experimental manipulation" (Morris et al., 1996, p. 138). Clothing types included formal (dress shirt with tie, dress slacks or skirt, dress with blazer, nice shoes), business casual (dress shirt or blouse, dress slacks or skirt, nice shoes), casual (polo or plain

shirt, nice jeans or khakis), and ultra-casual (t-shirt, jeans, flip-flops or moccasins) (Morris et al., 1996) (see Table 1). Clothing selections were validated by an expert in apparel studies.

Table 1

Teacher Confederates and Their Attire

Photograph Number	Gender	Age	Attire
1	Female	40s	Ultra-casual
2	Female	40s	Casual
3	Female	40s	Business Casual
4	Female	40s	Formal
5	Male	20s	Ultra-casual
6	Male	20s	Casual
7	Male	20s	Business Casual
8	Male	20s	Formal
9	Female	20s	Ultra-casual
10	Female	20s	Casual
11	Female	20s	Business Casual
12	Female	20s	Formal
13	Male	40s	Ultra-casual
14	Male	40s	Casual
15	Male	40s	Business Casual
16	Male	40s	Formal

Each confederate was instructed to maintain a similar nonchalant stance and impartial facial expression. Confederates were displayed on white backgrounds to maintain consistency in all aspects except attire (see Figure 1).



Figure 1. Female and male experimental confederates in business casual and casual attire, respectively.

Each participant was interviewed separately to ensure responses were not influenced by the presence of others. Each participant selected a number between one and 16 and was shown the corresponding confederate photograph. The participant then answered interview questions based on the photograph [s]he had seen. Interviews were conducted until data saturation was reached. A total of 24 participants took part in the study. Following the approved IRB protocol, participants were not informed of the study's focus on teacher attire until the conclusion of the school's data collection period so as to prevent them from anticipating and offering desired responses.

Instrumentation

Focused interviews were used to determine the impact of, "a uniform stimulus . . . on an interviewee" (Flick, 2006, p. 150). The researcher-developed interview protocol contained three sets of questions. Before being asked the first set of questions, the participant was informed that the confederate was a person who spent his/her day in the public school system. Questions then asked what role the participant thought the confederate held in the school and asked the participant to justify his/her decision. The second set of questions was asked after the participant was informed that the confederate was a teacher. Questions focused on what subject the teacher taught, the teacher's classroom atmosphere, the teacher's disciplinary actions and subject matter knowledge, and the level of respect the teacher received from his/her students. The third set of questions was similar to the second, but was asked after the participant was informed that the confederate was an agriculture teacher. Finally, several demographic questions were asked, including those regarding the student's involvement in or awareness of the school's agriculture program.

Data Collection

Data were collected through 30-minute, audio-recorded, one-on-one, face-to-face focused interviews. All students in each school were given a parental consent form and accompanying introductory letter which informed parents and students about the study one week before data collection began. Participants were interviewed at the school they attended, both of which were located in [County, State]. The interviews were conducted during a two-week period on 24 students

who were the first to bring their signed permission forms, after which it was determined that data saturation and maximum voluntary participation had been reached.

Data Analysis

Data were transcribed verbatim and analyzed using the constant comparative method (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Use of the constant comparative method involves coding incidences in the data into as many different categories as possible, while also comparing the current incident with those previously ascribed to the same category. This eventually evolves into solidified categories and then theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). To determine the trustworthiness of the study, credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability were established according to evaluative criteria developed by Lincoln and Guba (1985). Credibility was ensured through triangulation of sources (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1999), or the consistency of different data sources using the same method (students between schools). Transferability was established through thick description as interviews were conducted until data saturation and maximum voluntary participation were reached. Dependability was established through the performance of an inquiry audit conducted by an individual not involved with the study. Confirmability was established through triangulation between each of our thematic analyses.

Results

Students participating in the study first chose a number between one and 16 to determine which confederate they would view. Table 2 displays each student's viewed confederate and involvement with the school's agriculture program.

Table 2

Students' Viewed Confederates and Involvement with Agriculture Program

Student	Agriculture program involvement	Confederate	Confederate gender	Confederate age	Confederate attire
1	Unaware	3	Female	40s	Formal
2	Enrolled	4	Female	40s	Formal
3	Enrolled	5	Male	20s	Informal
4	Unaware	5	Male	20s	Informal
5	Aware	8	Male	20s	Formal
6	Unaware	7	Male	20s	Formal
7	Unaware	7	Male	20s	Formal
8	Aware	8	Male	20s	Formal
9	Aware	12	Female	20s	Formal
10	Enrolled	11	Female	20s	Formal

Table 2 (continued)

Students' Viewed Confederates and Involvement with Agriculture Program

Student	Agriculture program involvement	Confederate	Confederate gender	Confederate age	Confederate attire
11	Unaware	12	Female	20s	Formal
12	Unaware	13	Male	40s	Informal
13	Aware	5	Male	20s	Formal
14	Unaware	4	Female	40s	Formal
15	Unaware	4	Female	40s	Formal
16	Enrolled	4	Female	40s	Formal
17	Enrolled	3	Female	40s	Formal
18	Enrolled	13	Male	40s	Informal
19	Enrolled	13	Male	40s	Informal
20	Unaware	12	Female	20s	Formal
21	Unaware	9	Female	20s	Informal
22	Enrolled	14	Male	40s	Informal
23	Aware	3	Female	40s	Formal
24	Aware	14	Male	40s	Informal

Using the constant comparative method, interviews were transcribed and coded for themes. Emerging themes included several that spanned all students' perceptions, and several that differed among groups of students based on their involvement with the high school agriculture program. All uncovered themes were prevalent within both schools. Data yielded perceptual differences between students based on their involvement with the high school agriculture program and between formal (which included confederates dressed in business professional and business casual attire) and informal (which included confederates dressed in casual and ultra-casual attire) sartorial styles. Data did not yield any information regarding students' perceptions related to teacher gender or age. Therefore, the themes and student perception profiles are constructed according to the expanded categories for student involvement with the high school agriculture program (enrolled in agriculture classes, aware of but not enrolled in agriculture classes, and not aware of agriculture classes) and attire categories, which were collapsed from four (business professional, business casual, casual, ultra-casual) to two (formal and informal). Figures depicting themes were developed to assist readers in understanding how students of differing involvement with agriculture classes described confederates perceived as general teachers and agriculture teachers. These figures do not depict

frequencies of terms, but rather the emphasis of each characteristic perceived by the students with respect to other characteristics and other confederates. Figure 2 displays the perceptions of students enrolled in the high school agriculture program regarding general and agriculture teachers dressed in formal and informal attire.

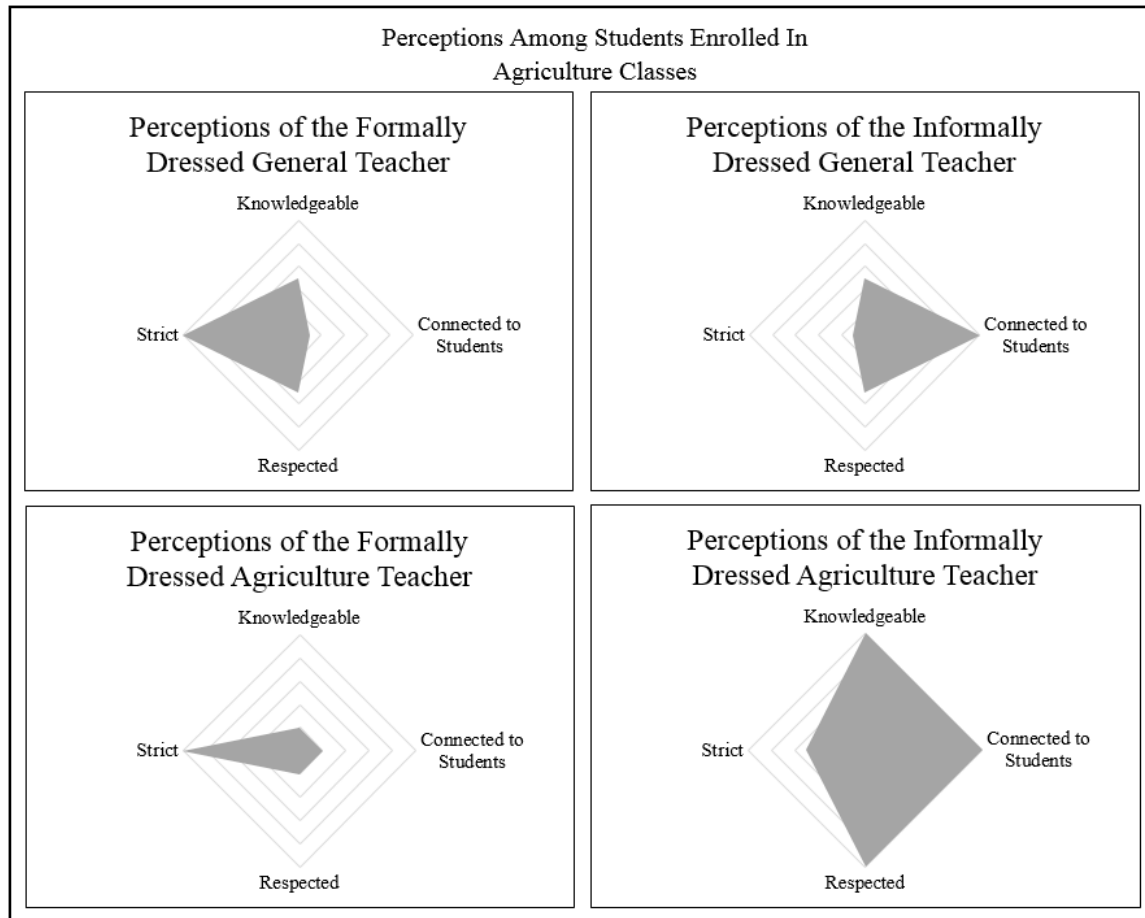


Figure 2. Perceptions regarding general and agriculture teachers dressed in formal and informal attire among students enrolled in agriculture classes.

Students enrolled in agriculture classes perceived the formally dressed general teachers as strict and disconnected from students, and had neutral perceptions regarding the teachers' level of respect and knowledge of subject matter. Student 16 perceived the formally dressed, older, female teacher as "kind of cold" (line 21), while Student 2 stated the same teacher was "a little strict" (line 12) and described her classroom atmosphere as "quiet" (line 24). Student 10 posited the formally dressed, younger female teacher "wouldn't give high fives in the middle of class" (line 25).

Students enrolled in agriculture classes perceived the formally dressed agriculture teacher as different than the formally dressed general teacher. This group of students felt agriculture teachers dressed in formal attire were not homophilic with their perceived images of agriculture teachers. Student 2 noted, "there's no way she would fit in" (line 36) and stated, "I don't know if I would respect her as much" (line 48). Student 2 added that the decrease in respect she felt for the formally dressed agriculture teacher stemmed from the teacher "looking like a sub or something. [Students] would look at her differently because she doesn't look or act how they do" (lines 52-

53). Student 10 indicated surprise when informed the young, formally dressed confederate was an agriculture teacher, stating, “really? I wouldn’t believe it. She doesn’t look like an ag. teacher... Whenever I think ag. teacher, I think big old fat guy with a beard. Poking some cows with a stick.” (line 36, 38). This student also acknowledged the confederate’s attire as the aspect that disconnected her from the persona of an agriculture teacher, noting, “high heels on in agri.? That’s weird stuff.” (lines 44-45). When asked why heels were not common for agriculture teachers, Student 10 claimed, “[they wear] boots. You don’t want to step in cow poop in high heels, that’s for sure.” (line 47). When viewing the older formally dressed female confederate, Student 16 noted, “she doesn’t look like that kind of teacher...like it wasn’t her first choice to be an ag. teacher...Because the way I see ag. teachers, they’re kind of country and, like, devoted to agriculture” (lines 35, 37, 39). These students held less respect for the formally dressed agriculture teacher than they did the formally dressed general teacher, noting, “students would act like she was a sub or something. They would look at her differently because she doesn’t look...she doesn’t act how they act” (Student 2, line 52-53). Student 10 suggested the lack of respect the young, formally dressed female confederate would endure as an agriculture teacher wasn’t because of her attire, but rather because of the subject she now taught:

Moderator: Are students respecting her?

Student 10: Probably not.

Moderator: No?

Student 10: It’s agri.

Moderator: Oh?

Student 10: Yeah, there’s not much respect in agri. (lines 56-61)

With regard to the informally dressed general teachers, students enrolled in agriculture classes perceived them as easy-going, connected to students, and leaders of easy classes. Student 19 described the older, informally dressed male confederate as “laid back” (line 12) and “chill” (line 16), indicating he did not look “like he would be very strict” (line 14). When viewing the young, informally dressed male confederate, Student 3 stated his classes were “probably not too hard, as long as you put forth the effort for them” (line 14). Student 18 viewed the informally dressed male confederate and felt, “like he just doesn’t care. Like he’s been there for so long that he just doesn’t care” (line 13). This student also indicated the teacher was not respected by the students because the confederate was “just casual” (line 18).

The students enrolled in agriculture classes were accepting of these teachers as agriculture teachers. When informed of the informally dressed confederate’s position as an agriculture teacher, Student 18 stated, “I can see that” (line 20). Student 19 agreed with the informal confederate being an agriculture teacher, stating, “yeah, because of his looks and how he dressed...his boots” (lines 31, 33). Student 19 suddenly viewed the teacher previously thought to be laid back as “knowledgeable” (line 42). Student 18, who perceived the informally dressed general teacher as one who didn’t care about his job, viewed the informally dressed agriculture teacher differently: “I think that he cares about his job and doesn’t want to get his clothes dirty” (line 31). Each of the students enrolled in agriculture classes who viewed informally dressed confederates perceived them as respected by students.

Figure 3 displays the perceptions of students aware of but not enrolled in the high school agriculture program regarding general and agriculture teachers dressed in more formal and informal attire.

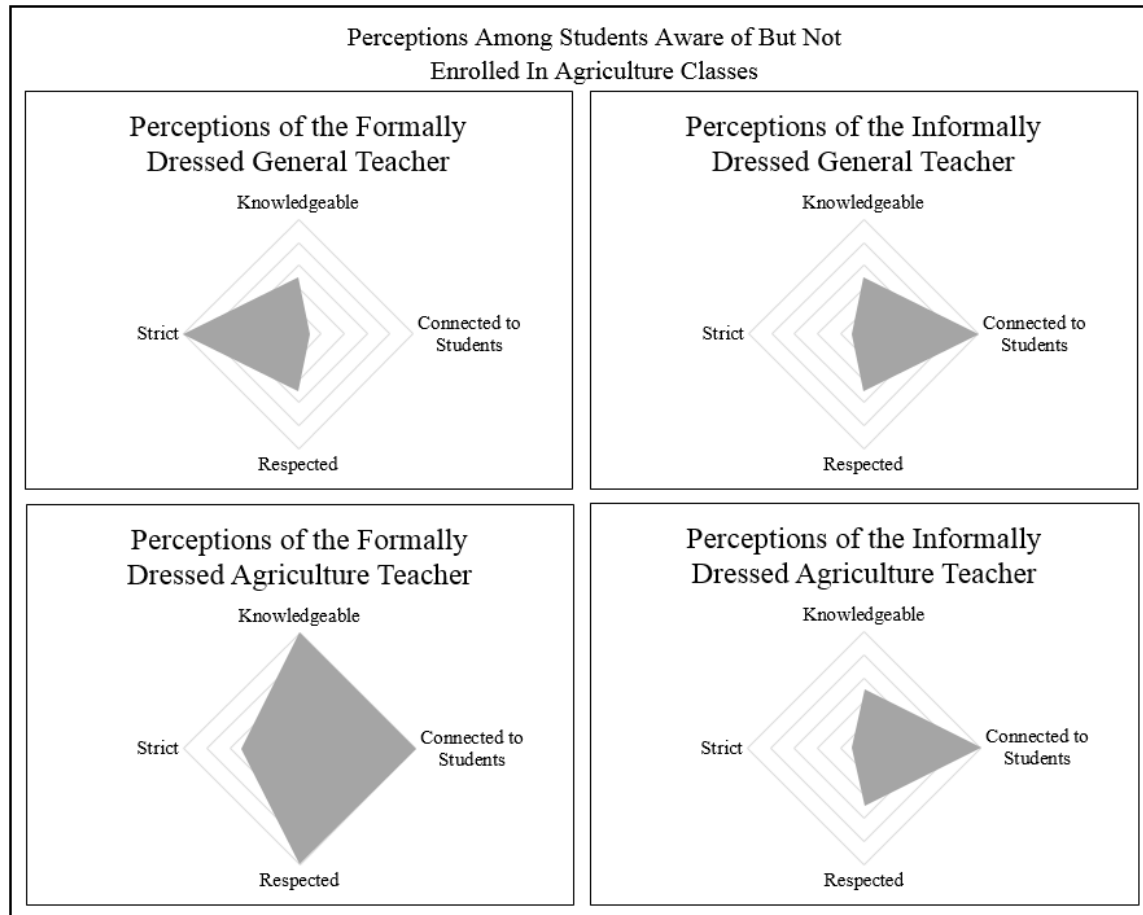


Figure 3. Perceptions of formally and informally dressed general and agriculture teachers among students aware of but not enrolled in agriculture classes.

Regarding the formally dressed general teacher, these students held perceptions similar to those held by students enrolled in agriculture classes, viewing them as disconnected from students and strict. Student 5 perceived the formally dressed young male confederate as having “a difficult time interacting with students” (line 12) and perceived him as receiving a moderate level of respect from students due to his lack of interest “in their personal lives” (line 18). Student 8 perceived this same confederate as a “nerd” (line 11), who maintained an “orderly, strict” (line 13) classroom. This student also noted these qualities led students to like the teacher to a lesser degree (line 19-20). Student 13 thought the young male confederate “had a bad day. Someone buy him some ice cream!” (line 15). Student 9, who viewed the young, formally dressed female confederate, stated, “I feel [her discipline] is a little harsh...I feel like she is a little rough sometimes” (lines 17-18).

Similar to their peers enrolled in agriculture classes, these students expressed surprise when told the formally dressed confederates were agriculture teachers. Student 9 stated, “I wouldn’t guess she was an agriculture teacher...She doesn’t seem like an agriculture teacher. That sounds really bad. She doesn’t look like an agriculture teacher. She looks too dressed up to be” (lines 23-26). Student 5 noted his astonishment was a result of his own perceptions of agriculture programs, stating, “I would be shocked, because most of the ag. teachers I have ever met do not dress like that during the school day...typically, [they wear] more work related clothes. Blue jeans...blue jeans and boots. Stuff like that” (lines 23-26). Just as that which occurred with the students enrolled in agriculture classes, perceptions of these teachers again changed, but not in the same way.

Students aware of agriculture classes, but not enrolled in them, viewed the formally dressed agriculture teacher as highly respected, knowledgeable, and connected to students, leading high quality learning experiences. Student 5 noted the formally dressed agriculture teacher's classroom would be "different" if he were a general teacher "because ag. is more hands on and he would probably allow talking while they were working" (lines 33-34). Student 8 referred specifically to the teacher's attire when noting how [s]he now perceived the formally dressed teacher, stating, "the nice attire changes [him] from high confidence to a...I don't know, it's hard to describe...playful" (line 30). Student 9 noted, "now that I know she is an agriculture teacher, she becomes nicer" (line 32). Student 13 stated the previously strict general teacher was "probably not strict" as an agriculture teacher (line 41). When asked about the formally dressed agriculture teacher's interactions with students, Student 5 replied, "Well, as an ag teacher, they are pretty perfect from what I understand" (line 37). Student 8 said, "with the setting, it would allow for more relaxed attitudes...they probably get to see his fun side more than if he was a science teacher" (lines 34, 36). Student 9 noted, "I have a feeling if she is an ag. teacher, then she knows what she is talking about. She could teach the students the way that they needed to be taught" (lines 30-31). Student 13 noted she held a "higher respect level" (line 34) for the formally dressed agriculture teacher than she did for the formally dressed general teacher.

Student 24 was the only participant who was aware of but not enrolled in agriculture classes and viewed an informally dressed confederate. While viewing the older, informally dressed general teacher, this student held perceptions similar to those enrolled in agriculture classes, noting he was easy-going and connected to students. Student 24 guessed the confederate was an art teacher and stated, "[he's] loose with the kids and building those relationships. Just from the way he is dressed. The blue jeans and the boots and the t-shirt" (lines 14-15).

When the student was informed of the confederate's position as an agriculture teacher, he responded, "that was my second choice. An agri. guy" (line 22). The student perceived the confederate to be knowledgeable about agriculture, stating, "looking at his boots...yeah, yeah, I guess he is" (line 24). He also perceived the teacher as receiving a high level of respect from the students, positing, "he is very respectful between he and the kids, and the kids know what the rules are and what is expected and he has put that out" (lines 28-29).

Figure 4 displays the perceptions of formally and informally dressed general and agriculture teachers held among students who were unaware of the agriculture programs within their schools. These were students who indicated no current or previous experience with the agriculture program or classes, and had indicated having no friends or acquaintances enrolled in agriculture classes.

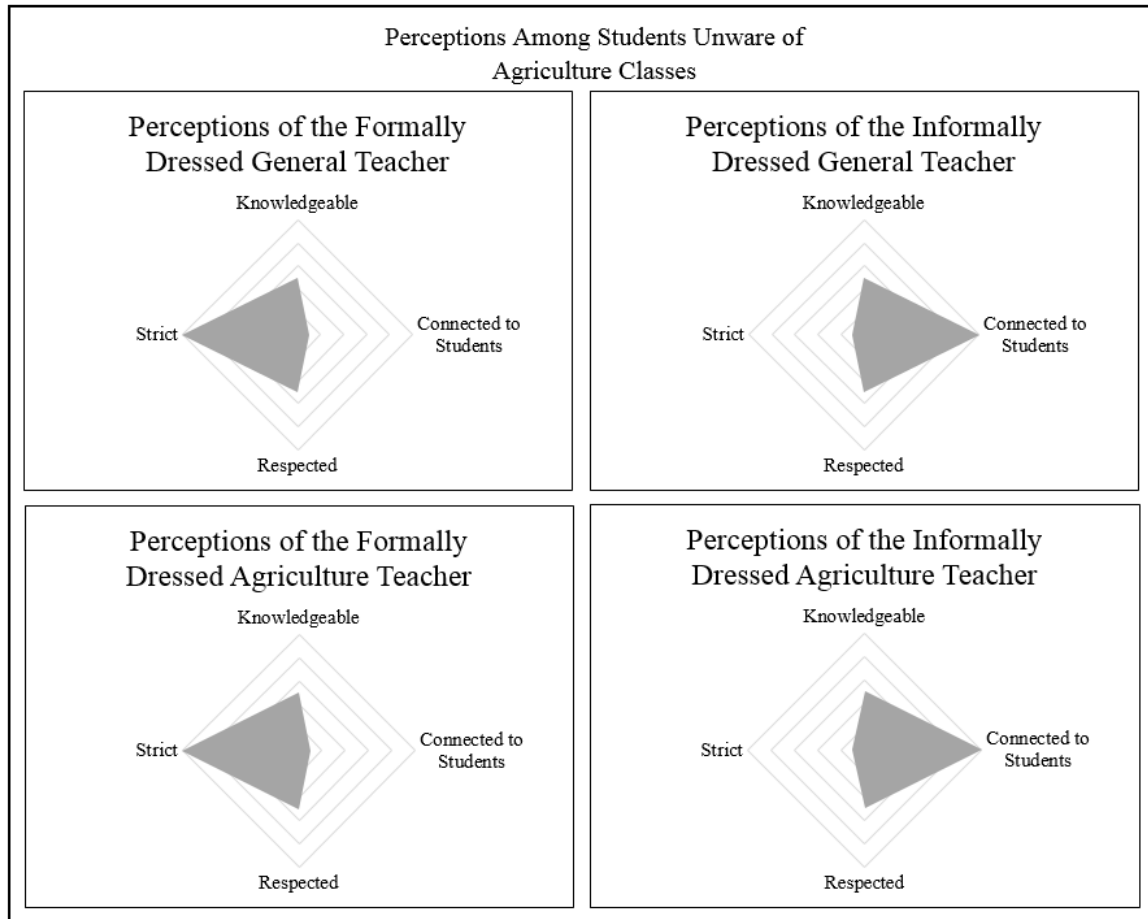


Figure 4. Perceptions of formally and informally dressed general and agriculture teachers among students unaware of agriculture classes.

Similar to the other students, these students viewed the formally dressed general teacher as strict and disconnected to students. Student 14 noted the older, formally dressed female teacher was “really strict. You know, she makes you learn” (line 11) and held these perceptions “because of the way she’s dressed” (line 13). This perception was also held by Student 15, who thought this confederate was a teacher of a core class, and stated, “if you get on her bad side, she’ll be more strict on you than others” (lines 11-12). Student 1 described the formally dressed older female teacher’s class as “strict and awful...I bet it’s hard” (line 20). Student 20 assumed the younger, formally dressed female was a librarian or English teacher who did not receive “a lot of respect” (line 23).

When informed of the formally dressed confederate’s position as an agriculture teacher, students’ perceptions did not shift as occurred with students enrolled in or aware of the agriculture program. Student 20 noted the classroom atmosphere and disciplinary actions of the formally dressed agriculture teacher were “still the same” as that of the formally dressed general teacher (lines 35, 39). Students 1 and 14 both stated they felt the formally dressed agriculture teachers were “still very strict” (Student 1: line 24, Student 14: line 24).

Keeping in line with the perceptions of the other students, those that were unaware of agriculture classes perceived the informally dressed general teacher as leading easy classes and being very connected with students. Student 21 stated the informally dressed younger female

teacher “tries to be more buddy-buddy and so she feels really comfortable around kids” (line 25), and stated that as a result of her friendly manner of interacting with students, “they also kind of see her as a kid” (line 30) and felt the students viewed her discipline to “be kind of a joke” (line 27). Student 12 noted the informally dressed older male teacher was “real good with kids” (line 22). Student 4 perceived the informally dressed younger male teacher as “laid back” (line 11) and noted his students “get to do what they want to do” (line 24).

Similar to the students who were unaware of agriculture classes and viewed the formally dressed confederates, these students perceived informally dressed agriculture teachers as no different from informally dressed general teachers. Student 4 noted, “he still looks like a laid back guy” (line 27). When informed that the confederate was an agriculture teacher, Student 21 simply stated, “I don’t have any experience with ag. teachers” (line 36) and proceeded to state similar traits in regard to the confederate’s classroom style and level of respect. Student 12 noted that his perceptions of the informally dressed older male agriculture teacher would “still be the same” (line 54) as they were of the informally dressed older male general teacher.

Conclusions/Implications

As concluded by Sebastian and Bristow (2008), instructors’ “style of dress may significantly influence students’ impressions of him or her” (p. 200), as students participating in this study acknowledged teacher dress as a source of their perceptions, and those perceptions were different based on the style of clothing viewed by each participant. Regardless of their involvement with the agriculture program, students perceived the formally dressed general teacher as being stricter and less connected with students, which is consistent with findings from previous studies (Butler & Roesel, 1989, 1991, Sebastian & Bristow, 2008). Similarly, the informally dressed general teacher was viewed as a figure opposing the formally dressed teacher, and was described as connected with students and laid back by each group of students. Again, these findings are consistent with those from previous studies (Carr et al., 2009).

Students’ expectations of agriculture teachers varied based on their experiences with the school’s agriculture program. For those students who had no involvement in or awareness of the agriculture program, their expectations of agriculture teachers were similar to those they held for general education teachers. Therefore, while they did perceive differences between formally and informally dressed teachers, they perceived no differences between the behaviors of agriculture teachers and general teachers.

Regarding students that were aware of the school’s agriculture but were not enrolled, the perceptions they held regarding the formally dressed agriculture teacher were different from those they held regarding the formally dressed general teacher. While formal attire led students to perceive the general teacher as strict and disconnected from students, the expectations students held for the agriculture teacher shifted their perceptions to encompass a friendlier, well-respected teacher who was knowledgeable and connected to the students. However, while their expectations of the agriculture teacher deviated from their expectations of the general teacher, they did not do so in a way that identified formal clothing as a violation of their expectations. Shortly put, students who were aware of but not enrolled in the agriculture program thought formally dressed agriculture teachers did not violate any expectations stemming from their roles as agriculture teachers.

Students who were enrolled in the school’s agriculture program viewed formal attire on agriculture teachers as a violation of their sartorial expectations of that teacher, but not of the general teacher. This violation was viewed negatively, as has been seen in studies regarding physical education teachers (Bradford et al., 2014). Alternately, informal attire was within these

students' expectations of the agriculture teacher, who viewed the informally dressed agriculture teacher more positively than they viewed the informally dressed general teacher. Thus, the expectations these students hold for general teachers and agriculture teachers are different, but in a manner that leads informal attire to be more positively perceived and formal attire to be more negatively perceived.

Recommendations

Similar to teachers of other subjects, and other professionals, agriculture teachers need to be cognizant of the messages sent by their choice of attire. Although previous studies have discovered that actual teaching behaviors were rated as much more important classroom factors than teacher clothing (Dougher & Gough, 2006; Gorham et al., 1999), attire is a component that can be easily changed. Findings of this study suggest students' expectations of the agriculture teacher may be influenced by their own experiences with agriculture classes and teachers. This study did not explore the sartorial choices of the students' agriculture teachers; however, as the students viewed their agriculture teachers regularly, their own teachers' attire could have influenced their expectations and perceptions. Further research should be conducted to determine how teacher attire impacts students' perceptions and expectations of the agriculture teachers.

As this study was qualitative in nature, the results should not be generalized beyond the context of the study. However, agriculture teachers are employed by their schools, the majority of which have established faculty dress codes (Workman & Freeburg, 2010). Therefore, we recommend agriculture teachers discuss their administrators' sartorial expectations, as the school dress code may conflict with attire more appropriate for specific agricultural settings. Agriculture teachers are the leaders of their agricultural programs, and serve as mentors to students interested in entering the agricultural, food, and natural resources workforce. This study provides a starting point in determining how agriculture teachers should dress to present themselves as agricultural role models for their students and effective teachers for their administrators, all while maintaining a safe work environment in agricultural settings.

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