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THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON SELF ESTEEM

by
Jennifer Rodriguez

A Thesis

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirement of the
Master of Arts Degree
of
The Graduate School
at
Rowan University
May 3, 2005

Approved by

Date approved

5/3/05

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ABSTRACT

Jennifer Rodriguez
THE EFFECTS OF SCHOOL UNIFORMS ON SELF ESTEEM
2004/05
Dr. Klanderman
Dr. Dihoff
School Psychology

The purpose of this study was to examine whether school uniforms have an effect on self esteem. The hypothesis was that school uniforms would increase self esteem. There were 87 total participants in this study; 41 students had uniforms and 46 did not. The Rosenberg Self Esteem scale was used to measure self esteem. The questionnaire was given to teachers to administer to the children in their classroom. An independent samples t test was performed to analyze the data. Results were not significant showing that school uniforms did not have an effect on self esteem.

Acknowledgements

I would first like to thank Dr. Klanderman and Dr. Dihoff; without their guidance and knowledge this thesis would never have been completed. I also appreciate the participation of the principals, teachers, and students that were involved. I would also like to thank the rest of the School Psychology students for all of their help along the way. Lastly, I would like to thank my mom, my family, and Ryan for all of their support, encouragement, and patience.

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Chapter One – The Problem

Need:

Recently, some of the public schools in the Vineland district have had a dramatic change. All of the elementary schools, with the exception of one, have adopted the use of school uniforms. Their school uniforms consist of khakis or black pants, depending on the school, and the school's t-shirt. The t-shirts vary in color and logo according to the particular school the child attends. Although the uniform is technically voluntary, most of the children wear one. The uniforms are being promoted in several ways. Teachers and administration wear them, there are prizes given to the classroom that has full participation for the week, as well as many other incentives.

Several researchers have studied school uniforms. The difference with this study is that it was done in a public school setting versus a parochial school setting. Having uniforms in this setting creates a unique set of circumstances. The way children view each other and school is probably going to change. This new environment is a very interesting topic to study. It will be very intriguing to see how the dynamics of the school and the children's feelings change.

Purpose:

By studying the new environment in the Vineland Public Schools, the researcher intends to examine how this change is affecting the children. Such a dramatic shift in a child's

everyday life has to have some consequences. Their lives and feelings probably change along with the school dress code. Their behavior may change; their grades may change; the way they treat each other may change; or the way they feel about themselves may change. Some, all, or none of these things may be affected because of the addition of school uniforms in a public school system.

There have been many studies done about how school uniforms effect different aspects of children's lives. Many researchers have looked into how uniforms affect behavior, academic achievement, attendance, and feelings of community. What has not been done with much frequency is how school uniforms effect children's feelings about themselves. Specifically, this study wants to find out whether or not school uniforms have an effect on the children's self esteem.

Hypothesis:

The researcher believes that public school uniforms will increase self esteem on an elementary school level. She feels this is so because young children will probably feel closer to their peers and teachers because they are all wearing the same clothing. The children may feel like they belong and are on an equal level with everyone else. Because of this sense of unity, the researcher believes that it will increase the children's overall self esteem.

Background:

Schools have always had some sort of restriction on the clothing that students are allowed to wear. Dress codes vary by school and location; some are stricter than others.

The reasoning behind having a dress code is to minimize distractions and maintain order in the school setting. The idea of uniforms in public schools is a relatively new one. It is believed that adopting school uniforms will build equality among students, keep schools safer, and build morale and school spirit. There is a controversy surrounding the idea of public school uniforms. Some people believe that it will have great outcomes for the schools and the children. Others believe that uniforms impinge upon the individuality and right to free speech of the students. Despite the controversy, there has been a major trend in the last ten years of public schools adopting mandatory or voluntary uniforms.

There have been many factors leading up to having uniforms in public schools. Parochial schools, race disputes, lawsuits, Supreme Court cases, and presidential beliefs have all had an effect on the uniform trend. The 1969 court case, *Tinker v. Des Moines School Dist.*, would begin the idea that public schools could enforce stricter dress codes. The outcome of this trial would open the door to uniforms in public schools; it would give schools the right to require uniforms. In Des Moines, Iowa, there was a meeting where a group of parents and students decided to wear black armbands to protest the United States involvement in Vietnam. Upon the school hearing about these plans, they implemented a policy against wearing these armbands. The policy stated that anyone wearing one would be asked to remove it, and if they refused, they would be suspended until they removed it. When several students wore the armbands and refused to remove them, they were all suspended. Consequently, the parents of 15-year-old John F. Tinker, 16-year-old Christopher Eckhardt, and 13-year-old Mary Beth Tinker filed suit against the school district in a U.S. District Court. The parents were arguing that the policy impeded upon the children's First Amendment rights. The court decided that the policy

was reasonable because it was done to prevent a disturbance. On appeal, the District Court decision was upheld. When the case went to the U.S. Supreme Court, the prior decisions were upheld (*Tinker v. Des Moines School District.*, [1969]).

Another factor that led up to the surge of policies mandating uniforms in public schools occurred in 1996. Every year, the President of the United States addresses America to discuss what is happening in the country and what he is doing to help. One of the major issues that is usually discussed is education. In the 1996 State of the Union Address, President Clinton suggested the use of uniforms to make schools safer. "I challenge all our schools to teach character education, to teach good values and good citizenship. And if it means that teenagers will stop killing each other over designer jackets, then our public schools should be able to require their students to wear school uniforms" (President Clinton). Since then, the popularity of uniforms in public school settings has greatly increased.

Another court case that emphasized the idea that it is constitutional for schools to limit student dress was *Phillips v. Anderson County School Dist.* (1997). In this case, the school had a past full of racial tension; there had been several fights between black children and white children over the wearing of the Confederate flag. Because of this, the school implemented a policy stating that children were not allowed to wear clothing that depicted the Confederate flag. In 1996, student James Kinley wore a jacket with the flag on it, refused to remove it, and was consequently suspended. When his parents refused to cooperate with the school's policy, Kinley's suspension was extended and his parents filed suit against the school. Judge William B. Traxler Jr. decided that the school

had a right to ban that clothing because that particular item had already caused disruption in the school (*Phillips v. Anderson County School Dist.*, [1997]).

Because of these factors and many others, there have been many public schools that have adopted school uniforms nationwide. One at a time, public schools have been successfully testing school uniforms with positive outcomes. When one school implements school uniforms with good results, it spreads to nearby schools and the local media. In this way, the trend of having uniforms in public schools has begun and will continue.

Definitions:

In this study, the term elementary school is used to describe a school that has the youngest grade levels. An elementary school houses children from kindergarten through fourth grade.

The term middle school is used to describe a school that houses children in grade between elementary school and high school. A middle school houses children from fifth grade to eighth grade.

The term self esteem refers to an individual's feelings of self worth; how much pride a person has in himself. It means how much a person likes or dislikes himself. Low self esteem refers to someone who does not like himself very much. High self esteem refers to someone who likes himself a good amount.

For the purposes of this study, the phrase socioeconomic status (SES) refers to a child or family's financial status. A family that has low income or lives in a non-

prosperous part of town is of low SES. A family that has high income or lives in a prosperous part of town is said to be of high SES.

Assumptions:

For the purposes of this study, there are a few assumptions that are made about the population being studied. One assumption the researcher is making is that the population being drawn from is normally distributed. It is also assumed that the sample has been randomly selected.

It is also assumed in this study that the subjects are of equivalent socioeconomic status. Even though the subjects are taken from different schools, they are all from the same city and general area.

Limitations:

One limitation of this study is that the children are self-reporting. Because of the age of the children, they may be unreliable in their assessment of themselves. It is possible that the children may not completely understand the question being asked. It is also possible that the children may just look over their neighbor's shoulder to see what answer he wrote.

Another limitation is that the subjects are taken from various classrooms and the different teachers may have an indirect effect on the children's self esteem. A teacher that has an extensive background in psychology, for example, may know techniques to foster self esteem in their classrooms. Or if a teacher does not enjoy her job and it is evident to the children, this may decrease the children's self esteem.

Another limitation of this study is that the individual teachers are the ones that are administering the questionnaire. Each teacher may explain the questions differently or work individually with one or more children.

Summary:

In Chapter Two, previous research on the topic of school uniforms and self esteem will be discussed. The literature on these two topics will be extensively reviewed and explained.

In Chapter Three, the methods of the study will be explained. This section will include what questionnaire will be used, including who will be administering it, how it will be administered and to whom it will be administered. The population and statistical analysis that will be used will also be described in this chapter.

In Chapter Four, the results will be described. After the data has been gathered and the statistical analysis run, the results will be given. The exact number and an explanation of the results will be explained in this chapter.

Lastly, Chapter Five will explain and discuss in detail what the results of the study were and why those results may have occurred. Also included in this chapter are suggestions for future research and a summary of the entire study.

Chapter Two-Review of Literature

Introduction:

There have been many studies done about the effects of school uniforms on many aspects of children's lives. There have been studies done on the effect of school uniforms on people's perceptions of the school environment, attendance, academic achievement, violence, gang presence and self esteem. There have also been many studies done on how different aspects of appearance effect self esteem. There have been studies on how weight and other aspects of physical appearance effect self esteem. This chapter will be split into two parts. Part I will review literature about school uniforms and Part II will review literature about self esteem.

Part I: School Uniforms

Perceptions:

The question in this section is not about what effect uniforms have. The question pertains to what people think uniforms have affected. What effects do people perceive uniforms have? Wade and Stafford (2003) examined how uniforms effected student's self perceptions and teacher and student perceptions of school climate and gang presence. There were 415 participants in this study from 6 public schools. Half of the schools had uniforms while the other half did not. The students were matched across ethnicity, socioeconomic status, achievement, and gender. The Self-Perception Profile for Children (SPPC) was administered to measure the self perceptions of the students. The National

Association of Secondary School Principals' Comprehensive Assessment of School Environments, School Climate Survey (CASE) was administered to measure perceptions of school climate. The Gang Presence and Identity Questionnaire (GPIQ) was administered to measure the perceptions of gang presence. For self perception, students in schools without uniforms reported significantly higher self perception than did students in schools with uniforms. For school climate, there was no significant difference between schools with or without school uniforms. And for gang presence, teachers reported significantly lower levels of gang presence for schools with uniforms while students reported no significant difference. Woods and Ogletree (1992) also did a study dealing with gang presence and violence in schools. They administered surveys to parents and found that after uniforms were implemented, parents perceived as gang presence and violence being lessened.

Murray (1997) and Isaacson (1998) also did studies on people's perceptions of school uniforms. They both examined whether students perceived school climate differently if they had school uniforms. Murray (1997) used two urban middle schools, one with school uniforms, and the other without. Results showed that students with school uniforms perceived their school climate in a more positive light than did students without school uniforms. Isaacson (1998) used survey research to find out if uniforms effected perceptions. She found that uniforms resulted in higher perceptions of school climate.

On the other hand, there have been studies done that have been inconclusive about people's perceptions or the perceptions are negative. Workman (2003) did a study involving administrators, teachers, parents, and students. He wanted to know if uniforms

had an effect on people's perceptions of school community. Within the definition of school community, Workman (2003) included behavior, safety, and achievement. He used interviews and observations to measure perceptions of school community. He found that perceptions on how uniforms affect behavior, safety, and achievement vary.

Bruce's (2004) findings are in agreement with Workman's (2003). Bruce (2004) did a study examining how school uniforms impact perceptions of the learning environment. He surveyed students, looked at student's work and observed to measure perceptions. He found that students were conflicted on how they felt. He found that they did not enjoy wearing the uniforms, but they could see the usefulness of them. Kutner (1992) states that many parents do not like uniforms because it decreased their sense of individuality and creativity.

Attendance and Achievement:

There have also been studies done on how school uniforms effect attendance and achievement. Some people feel that uniforms can create an appropriate environment for learning (White, 2000). Some people feel that uniforms have a negative, positive or no effect on these two factors. Brunnsma and Rockquemore (1998) did a study investigating whether uniforms affected attendance and achievement. They used data from The National Educational Longitudinal Study of 1988 (NELS:88) to test their hypothesis. The NELS:88 is a national stratified random sample of schools and students. Schools included Catholic, non-Catholic and public schools. The studies followed the students beginning when they were in eighth grade, the study finally ended when the students were in their second year of college. Brunnsma and Rockquemore (1998) took data from

the second follow-up, when the students were in tenth grade. Results showed that uniforms had no significant effect on attendance. On the other hand, uniforms were shown to have a negative effect on academic achievement. Schools with uniforms had lower test score than schools without uniforms.

Williams (2003) and Holloman (1995) are in agreement with Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998). Williams (2003) did a study comparing the same students over two years. He looked at how attendance and achievement were affected by school uniforms. He found no significant difference in students after they got uniforms for attendance or achievement. Holloman's (1995) results showed that having school uniforms compromised academic achievement.

Barton, Coley, and Wenglensky (1998) found that school uniforms are not correlated with academic achievement. Stevenson and Chunn (1991) found that there was no significant correlation between school uniforms and academic achievement.

On the other hand, Washington-Labat (2003) and Thomas (1994) disagree with the findings of Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998). Washington-Labat did a study examining attendance by reviewing archival data from a three-year period. She found that attendance differences were significant; attendance rates were significantly higher for the years following implementation of school uniforms. The results of Thomas' (1994) study showed that uniforms raised student achievement.

Samuels (2003) and Polacheck (1996) also disagree with Brunσμα and Rockquemore (1998). Samuels did a study investigating the effects of uniforms on attendance and academic achievement using archival records. She found that attendance

and achievement both increased significantly. Polacheck (1996) believes that uniforms are related to better grades and significantly higher achievement.

Bodine (2003) adamantly disagrees with Brunnsma and Rockquemore (1998). She wrote an article specifically putting down their findings. In her article, she states, “In reexamination of the authors’ data, I found no evidence to support their claim...the claim resulted from misleading use of sector analysis” (Bodine, 2003). When she looked at the overall sample, she saw that the schools with uniforms had higher mean test scores than did schools without uniforms. Bodine (2003) says that when running their analysis, Brunnsma and Rockquemore (1998) omitted the public school sector, only including Catholic and non-Catholic sectors.

Brunnsma and Rockquemore replied to Bodine’s claim in a 2003 article. They state,

Indeed, there was a correlation between uniforms and achievement for the weighted, full 10th-grade set, but until other factors are taken into account, this correlation alone does not have statistical or substantive meaning. Bodine misused the term *omitted*, assuming that the relationship between public school uniform policies and public school academic achievement was not included in this correlation; however, it was included.

Basically, Brunnsma and Rockquemore (2003) explain how they ran their statistical analyses and they stand by their findings. They say that the means of the overall sample being higher with school uniforms does not imply causation. They still believe that school uniforms effect academic achievement negatively.

Violence:

Violence in schools has always been a problem and may always be a problem. One reason there is violence in schools is competition over dress and appearance (LaPoint, Holloman, and Alleyne, 1992). Children fight over designer jackets and expensive shoes. Another reason may be because strangers are indistinguishable from students (Gursky, 1996). School uniforms may be a way to reduce this problem. King, Walker, and Minor (2002) did a study on how school uniforms effect violence. They sent out a survey and 74 responses were returned. The sample included elementary schools, middle schools, high schools and universities. They reported a relationship between uniforms and violence; violence was higher in schools with no uniforms.

Tanioka and Glaser (1991) also did a study on how school uniforms effect violence. They believe that having school uniforms can help decrease violence. They administered the Richmond Youth Study questionnaire to high school students in public and private schools. They found that students were less likely to commit crimes when wearing their uniforms. Tanioka and Glaser (1991) believe that this is because the students would be more easily identified if they were wearing their uniforms.

Bodine (2003) did a study on school uniforms and violence. She used observation, conversation, and distributed surveys with teachers, parents and students to measure her hypothesis. Of the total number of surveys distributed, 486 were returned; she randomly selected 30 parents and 14 students to interview. She found that school safety was increased and violence was lessened as a result of school uniforms.

Starr (2000), Caruso (1996), and Stephens (1996) all believe that violence is a problem in schools. Although they may have varying reasons why violence occurs in

schools, they do agree on some things. They all feel that school uniforms help decrease amounts of violence in schools. Kennedy (1995), Golden (1993), and Glassner (1999) all feel the same way. They have shown that uniforms decrease fighting.

There was one study showing that school uniforms do not have an effect on school violence. Massare (2004) did a study investigating behavior of students especially focusing on negative behaviors. He looked at archival records to get his data. He measured behavior problems through discipline referrals. Massare (2004) found that despite school uniforms, discipline referrals increased.

Gang Presence:

Gang presence in schools is not a problem in every town, but it is a problem statewide and nationwide. Some people believe that by enforcing uniforms, gangs will not be able to display their signs and emblems. In this manner, gang presence can be reduced. Gullatt (1999) did a study relating school uniforms to gang presence. He distributed surveys to 66 school districts in Louisiana and 50 to districts from other states. The surveys included questions on school uniforms, policies, discipline referrals and gang presence. The results of his study revealed that uniforms lessen discipline problems, increased school harmony and decreased gang presence.

Holloman, LaPoint, Alleyne, Palmer, and Sanders-Phillips (1996) agree with Gullat. They believe that gangs displaying their insignias cause many problems within school systems. They believe that by dressing everyone the same, gang presence and violence will be reduced. King (1996), Scherer (1991), Kennedy (1995), and Loesch

(1995) are all also in agreement on the gang presence issue. They believe that school uniforms can reduce gang violence and victimization of students.

In opposition to these studies, Wilkins (1999) opposes uniforms as a way to combat gang presence and violence. She believes that uniforms are not effective against these problems. She states that just because gangs cannot wear their emblems in schools that the gangs will break up. Wilkins (1999) says that gang members not being able to recognize each other for six hours a day does not reduce the overall problem.

Self Esteem:

Although there are many studies showing that school uniforms effect many aspects of children's lives, there are not many studies examining whether or not uniforms have an effect on the self esteem of students. In their article, Ryan and Ryan (1998) state that school uniforms increase self esteem. They believe that when there are no uniforms, students who are not wearing the stylish, trendy clothes are teased and ostracized. Because uniforms eliminate that factor, students are no longer teased and their self-confidence and esteem increase.

Bruggeman (1998) did a study investigating if school uniforms had an effect on self esteem. The participants were 335 randomly selected sixth, seventh, and eighth grade students. They were taken from two schools, one with uniforms and one without. She used the Coopersmith Self-Esteem Inventory to measure self esteem. The results showed that the students attending schools with uniforms had significantly higher levels of self esteem than did the students attending schools without uniforms.

Jonkey (2004) and Gregory (1998) both did studies attempting to link school uniforms and self esteem. Both of the researchers believed that having school uniforms would increase self esteem. Results for both studies showed that school uniforms did have a significant effect on self esteem. School uniforms were shown to increase self esteem.

Part II: Self Esteem

Weight:

Weight is a major issue for a lot of people. Many people feel that being overweight is associated with depression, low self esteem, and anxiety. Children are just as susceptible to the effects of the pressure to be beautiful as adults are. Weight issues may affect their psychological well being as well. French, Perry, Leon, and Fulkerson (1996) and Davidson and Birch (2001) have shown that self esteem is affected in obese adolescents all the way through obese five-year olds.

Foster, Wadden, and Vogt (1997) did a study dealing with obese women, weight loss, their body image and how it relates to self esteem. They wanted to know whether weight loss is related to an increase in body image and self esteem. The participants were selected through a clinical trial that was examining the effectiveness of diet and exercise. There were a total number of 60 women in this study of varying races. For weight loss, the subjects ate a 925-kcal a day diet of portion-controlled food as well as liquid meal replacements for 16 weeks. After the 16 week period, the diet was replaced by regular foods that the participants chose themselves. All participants also received cognitive behavioral treatment to help improve their body image. Body image was measured using

the Multidimensional Body-Self Relations Questionnaire. Self esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. Results showed that when participants lost weight, they showed significant improvement in their body image and their self esteem.

Walker, Gately, Bewick, and Hill (2003) did a study dealing with children in a weight loss camp. They were investigating self esteem in obese children and how weight loss camp effects this factor. The camp the children attended consisted of interventions of physical activity, diet, and education. The researchers used 57 of the campers for their study as well as 38 normal weight children for a comparison. To measure self esteem, the researchers used the Self-Perception Profile for Children. Measures were taken on the first and again on the last day of camp. Results showed that on the first day, the self esteem of the obese children was significantly lower than that of the normal weight children. On the last day, measures showed that the campers lost a significant amount of weight. It was also shown that on the last day, the self esteem of the campers was significantly increased, whereas the self esteem of the normal weight children did not change significantly. Basically, a change in weight resulted in an increase in self esteem.

On the other hand, not all people feel that this issue is cut and dry. Thomas-Dobersen, Butler-Simon, Fleschner (1993) and Cameron (1999) believe that the effects of weight on self esteem are not constant. They say that studies have shown that self esteem does not change with treatment; others have shown that it increases, and others have shown that it decreases. They feel that self esteem is not directly related to weight.

Other Aspects of Physical Appearance:

Weight is not the only aspect of physical appearance that can affect self esteem. It seems that anything others can see can have a negative effect. Hair, large noses, birth defects, scars, height, etc. can relate to how we feel about ourselves. How others view us can impact our feelings about ourselves.

Gleason, Alexander, and Somers (2000) did a study dealing with childhood teasing. They investigated whether teasing someone about their appearance has an effect on their self esteem later in life. The participants were 164 undergraduate males and females. To measure their history of teasing, the researchers used the Physical Appearance Related Teasing Scale. Self esteem was measured using the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. Results showed that self esteem in males was correlated with teasing about their appearance, but teasing was not predictive of the males' self esteem. In females, teasing about appearance was significantly predictive of self esteem. In other words, teasing about appearance was related to self esteem in women, but not as strongly in men.

Kenealy, Gleason, Frude, and Shaw (1991) did a study investigating how perceived general physical attractiveness relates to self esteem. There were 1018 children between the ages of 11.5 and 12.5 participating in this study. To measure physical attractiveness, the researchers used self ratings and ratings by others. The children rated themselves on a scale from one of the worst looking in their class to one of the best looking in their class. Outsiders were used to get an objective rating of the attractiveness of the children based on their faces and teeth. To measure self esteem, the children completed the Piers-Harris Children's Self Concept Scale. On dental ratings,

results showed that there was a significant effect of perception of dental attractiveness to self esteem. For facial attractiveness, results showed a significant effect of perception of facial attractiveness on self esteem. The results of this study show that physical appearance seems to have an effect on self esteem.

Tantleff-Dunn and Thompson (2000) did a study examining whether peoples' satisfaction with their chest size influences their self esteem. In males, they investigated whether satisfaction with the size of their chest muscles affected their self esteem and in women whether satisfaction with the size of their breasts affected their self esteem. There were 68 male and 120 female participants. To measure their satisfaction with their chest size, subjects completed the Breast/Chest Rating Scale. This measures the discrepancy between their ideal chest size and their actual chest size. To measure self esteem, participants completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale. For women, results showed that there was no significant correlation between breast size satisfaction and self esteem. For men, the correlations were significant. Basically, women's chest size satisfaction did not seem to affect their self esteem, whereas in men, chest size satisfaction does seem to affect their self esteem.

Summary:

The review of literature seemed to show inconsistent findings. Many of the studies showed that school uniforms affect many aspects of children's lives positively and others showed the children are affected negatively. There were a number of studies showing that attendance, academic achievement, violence, gang presence, and self esteem are increased as a result of school uniforms. On the other hand, there are also studies

showing that these factors are affected negatively or not at all. In terms of self esteem, the literature review seems to have uncovered the idea that self esteem is related to physical appearance. Most of the studies reviewed resulted in a change in self esteem when appearance or people's perception of appearance changed.

Chapter Three - Methods

Sample:

There were a total of 87 participants in this study. All of the participants were recruited from three public elementary and middle schools in South Jersey. Participants were in fourth and fifth grades ranging in ages. There were 47 males and 40 females. Of the total number of participants, 46 attended schools that had a uniform policy and 41 attended schools that did not have a uniform policy.

Measures:

To measure the self esteem of the children, they all completed the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale (1989). The test was administered by the children's teacher. This scale is a Likert scale and contains ten questions. Items are answered on a four point scale from strongly agree to strongly disagree. The sample this scale was originally developed with consisted of 5,024 High School Juniors and Seniors from 10 randomly selected schools in the state of New York. The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale is very widely used and has been shown to have high reliability with the test-retest correlations typically in the range of .82 to .88 (The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale). It has also been shown that this scale has high construct validity (Hagborg, 1996). This same study found that the Rosenberg scale had no significant differences by gender or grade (Hagborg, 1996). The validity and reliability of this scale is so well established that it is often used as the comparison test when investigating the reliability and validity of a new test.

Design:

The researcher hypothesized that public school uniforms would increase self esteem on an elementary and middle school level. Specifically, the children who attended schools that had a uniform policy would have higher self esteem than the children that attended schools with no uniform policy. To test this hypothesis, an experimental design was used. The independent variable was school uniforms with two levels (school uniforms and no school uniforms). The dependent variable was self esteem as measured by the scores on the Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.

Analysis:

To examine whether school uniforms had an effect on self esteem, an independent samples t-test was performed.

Chapter Four – Results

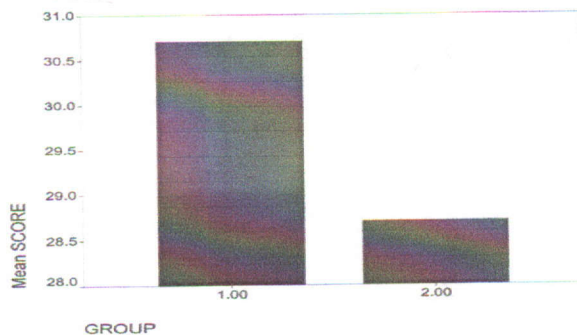
Introduction:

This study was attempting to examine whether school uniforms have an effect on self esteem. The population that was used was elementary and middle school students from public schools. The hypothesis was that students who have school uniforms would show significantly higher scores in self esteem than students who did not have uniforms. The measure of self esteem that was used was The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale.

Results:

An independent samples t-test was used to analyze the data that was collected. The mean score of the students who have school uniforms was 28.70. The mean score of the students that do not have uniforms was 30.71. See figure 4.1. The results of the t-test showed that there was no significant difference between these two groups with a $t = 1.761$, $p = .082$.

Figure 4.1
Group 1.00 – no uniforms Group 2.00 - uniforms



Summary:

The results showed that there was no significant difference between the scores of students with and without school uniforms. The data indicated that the hypothesis was not supported. School uniforms do not seem to have any effect on the self esteem of children. Surprisingly, the mean score of the students that did not have uniforms was higher than the mean score of the children with school uniforms. That is to say that on average, students without school uniforms had higher levels of self esteem than did children with school uniforms, even if it was not a significant difference.

Chapter Five – Summary and Conclusions

Summary:

In recent years there has been a change in the environment of the public elementary schools in a town in South Jersey. The public elementary schools have begun to adopt school uniforms for their students and their faculty and staff. This major shift in clothing probably had an effect on the overall environment of the schools. The uniforms probably had an effect on academic achievement, attendance, violence, and self esteem. The new dynamics this situation creates is what fueled the interest for this study. Specifically, this study examined whether school uniforms increased self esteem.

There have been several studies that have examined what impact school uniforms have on many aspects of school environments. There have been studies done on how uniforms effect people's perceptions of schools. The majority of these studies found that having school uniforms made parents, teachers and students perceive schools in a more positive light. How uniforms effect attendance and achievement has also been studied. The majority of these studies found that attendance and academic achievement are increased by uniforms. Violence and how school uniforms effect it is another major topic that has been studied. The results of these studies show by a landslide that uniforms have a positive effect of violence; uniforms decrease violence. Gang presence and how it relates to school uniforms is another major topic of research. These studies showed that uniforms decrease the presence of gangs in schools. Finally, self esteem and school uniforms has also been examined. Of the four studies looking at self esteem and school uniforms, all of them found that uniforms increase self esteem.

In the current study, there were 87 participants from three public schools in South Jersey. Of the total number of participants, 46 had uniforms and 41 did not. The Rosenberg Self Esteem Scale was used to measure self esteem. A t test was used to analyze the outcomes. Results showed that school uniforms have no effect on self esteem.

Discussion:

The results of this study showed that uniforms have no effect on self esteem. These results are not consistent with the findings of prior research. The bulk of prior research done found that uniforms had a positive effect on many aspects of school life. Specifically, studies showed that uniforms increase positive perceptions of schools, increase attendance, increase achievement, decrease violence, decrease gang presence, and increase self esteem. The results of this study are not in agreement with the findings of past research.

The hypothesis in this study was that students that attended schools with uniforms would have higher self esteem scores than students who attended schools without uniforms. Results showed that this hypothesis was not supported. Even more interesting was the mean scores of the students. Students that attended schools with uniforms had lower mean scores than did students that attended schools with no uniforms. There may have been many reasons for the results to turn out the way they did. First of all, the students that had uniforms attended elementary schools whereas the students that did not have uniforms attended a middle school. Although the students without uniforms were only a year older than the students with uniforms, they may have been better able to

understand the questionnaire than the younger students were. Another effect that the age difference may have had was that the older students were more mature and sure of themselves; they may have been more certain of their identity. If this were the case, the older students would have higher self esteem for reasons other than uniforms. Another reason for the discrepancy between the hypothesis and the results may have been that the students were drawn from different schools and different classrooms. The different school and classrooms environments may have had an effect on self esteem. The way the schools and classrooms are set up or run may foster or hinder the children's feelings about themselves. Finally, the different teacher that administered the survey may have explained the questions and possible answers differently to the students.

Conclusions:

Because of how the results turned out, one must conclude that school uniforms do not have an effect on self esteem. Even more interestingly, because the mean scores of the students without uniforms was higher than the mean scores of the students without uniforms, one must conclude that if the sample size was greater, the results may have shown that school uniforms decrease self esteem.

Suggestions:

Future research on this and related topics is needed. There is not much research that has been done on uniforms in schools. This is a relatively new idea that needs to be examined further before any conclusions can be made. There are many schools that are implementing uniforms because of results from a few select studies showing that

uniforms have a positive effect on students and schools. Although the majority of the studies that have been done are showing this to be true, more studies need to be done before uniform programs can be implemented with confidence.

More studies on uniforms as they relate to academic achievement, attendance, violence, gangs, and self esteem are needed. This research should also be done across different ages, socioeconomic status, races and gender. Longitudinal studies are also lacking in the currently available research. Another interesting topic would be how uniforms effect parental participation and involvement in schools. So far, there do not seem to be any studies done on that particular topic.

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Appendix

Appendix

INSTRUCTIONS: BELOW IS A LIST OF STATEMENTS DEALING WITH YOUR GENERAL FEELINGS ABOUT YOURSELF. IF YOU STRONGLY AGREE, CIRCLE SA. IF YOU AGREE WITH THE STATEMENT, CIRCLE A. IF YOU DISAGREE, CIRCLE D. IF YOU STRONGLY DISAGREE, CIRCLE SD.

Male Female

I used to wear uniforms in my old school. Yes No

My old school was _____

1. On the whole, I am satisfied with myself. SA A D SD
- 2.* At times I think I am no good at all. SA A D SD
3. I feel that I have a number of good qualities. SA A D SD
4. I am able to do things as well as most other people. SA A D SD
- 5.* I feel I do not have much to be proud of. SA A D SD
- 6.* I certainly feel useless at times. SA A D SD
7. I feel that I'm a person of worth, at least on an equal plane with others.
SA A D SD
- 8.* I wish I could have more respect for myself. SA A D SD
- 9.* All in all, I am inclined to feel that I am a failure. SA A D SD
10. I take a positive attitude toward myself. SA A D SD