

WHY DO MALE STUDENTS UNDERACHIEVE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION?

A ST. LUCIAN CASE STUDY

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DEDICATION

To my parents: Samuel and Sarah and to Jewel, Samuel Jr and Emmanuel.

For my family, the journey was worth it.

ABSTRACT

WHY DO MALE STUDENTS UNDERACHIEVE IN TERTIARY EDUCATION

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The purpose of this study was to explore underachievement of male students at a tertiary institution in St. Lucia, and to understand the contributory factors giving rise to underachievement from the perspectives of the male students themselves. Male educational underachievement manifests itself in various forms, from educational disengagement, exclusion, truancy, and even resistance to education. Moreover, educationally underachieving students are more likely to be faced with limited opportunities to participate in both the job market and in academic advancements. While academic underachievement is a perennial problem that is experienced at the primary, and secondary levels of education, male academic underachievement is gaining momentum in tertiary levels of education. At this level, male students enter the institutions with above average grades, yet record high underachievement levels and higher dropout rates compared to female students.

This research is informed by Bourdieu's social and cultural capital concept (Bourdieu, 1986) which provides the theoretical framework for the research and considers academic underachievement to happen as a result of class inequalities within the education system. Using Bourdieu's concept of habitus, field and capital, this research attempts to understand the factors contributing to male academic underachievement in tertiary education and addresses a gap in the literature using this theoretical approach.

A case study method of inquiry, using individual and focus group interviews allowed for multiple facets of male academic underachievement to be revealed and understood. Through the data analysis, the themes that emerged illustrated how underachieving male students conceptualize themselves as learners, and also revealed the factors that contributed to the poor academic outcomes of these students. The research drew on the experiences of 30 male students and 8 teachers and through their voices, this research was able to highlight some factors, other than cognitive factors, which caused male students to academically underachieve at the tertiary level of learning.

The principal findings from this research are that young males in tertiary education are predestined to underachieve as a result of their limited composition of social, cultural and economic capital. Underachieving male students' lack of investment in social capital facilitates their academic failure and limits their upward mobility. Moreover, the lack of financial information, access to financial support, institutional support, and teacher practices, lower student engagement and participation in tertiary education. Underachieving male students are more likely to be extrinsically motivated but are, in the absence of social networks, positively supported by their peers.

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CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

This chapter serves as an introduction to a study on male academic underachievement in tertiary education. It presents the aim of the study and the rationale for conducting the study, followed by a background to male academic underachievement from a St. Lucian perspective. The chapter also introduces the research questions and the approaches used to gather data on male academic underachievement.

The academic performance of underachieving students, in particular, male students, has been an area of major concern within the Caribbean, raising significant media and academic debate as well as producing a host of divergent hypotheses (Edmund-woods, 2011). In the English speaking Caribbean, gender and its role in education have dominated a significant part of the literature on student underachievement (Miller, 1986, 2003; Figureoa, 1996; Chavannes, 1999; Parry, 2000; Bailey *et al.*, 2002), with an emphasis on differential performance based on gender in Caribbean secondary schools. Divergent views on male academic underperformance for instance, male marginalization within the school system (Miller, 1986, 1991,1994), the historical privileging of males (Figueroa, 1996), school and socialization factors (Evans, 1999) and financial constraints (Bailey and Brown, 1999) have all underscored the complexities of male academic underperformance within the Caribbean region, and the prevailing gender achievement gap in Caribbean academic institutions confirms the underperformance of male students at all levels of education. The Caribbean Examination Council's (CXC) external examination statistics (CXC, 2011), for instance, reveal a 41% overall pass rate for girls in all subject areas as compared to a 36% overall pass for boys, confirming that in most areas of assessed cognitive ability girls have a comprehensive grasp of key concepts, knowledge and competencies required for successful academic outcomes. Women have surpassed men, not only in secondary level graduation rates, but also in tertiary level enrollment and degree completion (Goldin, Katz, Kuziemko, 2006).

Within the English speaking Caribbean region, statistics for tertiary education reveal that female enrollment rates at tertiary institutions have significantly increased over male enrollment rates 3:1 (University of the West Indies Statistics, 2009). This indicates that, as a group, young men are lagging far behind in most school academic endeavours (Kafer, 2004). In particular, the gender disparity has become most apparent in the choice of subjects that students pursue in both post-secondary and tertiary education (Ministry of Education, 2011). Nonetheless, academic underachievement is a complex and challenging issue with far-reaching implications for individual well-being, as the vast majority who experience unsuccessful educational outcomes are faced with high skill deficiencies that do not match the needs of the changing work environment. The problem of underachievement is of particular concern in St. Lucia because of the observable disengagement and non-participation of male students in schools and other social activities. This disengagement has been shown to have a direct correlation with the quality of life that these young males encounter after an unsuccessful educational experience which, in turn, results in life-long negative experiences of unemployment, crime and delinquent behavior.

In the Caribbean context, male students with unsuccessful educational experiences are commonly stigmatised by society, and by the media, as education misfits whose behaviour stems from the deliberate choices that they make (Gross, 2010). These poor choices perpetuate negative attitudes and behaviours toward school, class, and instruction (McCoach and Siegal, 2003) and challenge students' interest and desire to engage in the learning environment.

The consequences of male academic underachievement continue to extend in St. Lucia far beyond the school system. They reflect in the everyday social habits and practices of boys and men and their impact is apparent in the socio-economic development of the country. As an 'at risk' group, young men are ill-prepared for the transitional experience from school into the labour market, as they are not adequately equipped with the necessary job market skills. Learners are not achieving at their full potential, and are not achieving adequate literacy and numeracy skills, which in turn " contributes to insufficient improvements in socio-economic development" (OECS, 2012 P. 12). Consequently, they are placed at a disadvantage thus increasing their chances of economic and social exclusion (Gillborn and Mirza, 2000). While the

St. Lucian education system has seen significant progress made through the implementation of Universal education, both at the primary and secondary level of learning, inequalities within the system still exist (OECS, 2012). This is evident where those disadvantaged socially and economically do not enjoy the benefits of the improved education system. Since the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2006/7, the gross enrolment rate of students within the education system has increased from 76% in 2006 to 98% in 2011 (Ministry Of Education, 2012). However, deficiencies within the system were identified where male students continued to perform poorly at the secondary level of education. In an attempt to reverse the gender disparity at both levels of education, strategic alliances were formed with agencies such as the Commonwealth Secretariat to develop educational strategies to address the issue of male underachievement and to eliminate the gender disparity in education (Rampersad, 2011). In 2011, St .Lucia, in collaboration with the Commonwealth Secretariat and three other Caribbean countries, unveiled a three year long Caribbean project aimed at developing programmes to address the issue of educational underachievement of boys.

Recognizing the problems faced by male students in education, this research is placed in the context of education with reference to St. Lucia, and takes into consideration the nature of male academic underachievement in tertiary education. While attempts have been made through Caribbean based research to identify factors affecting student performance in tertiary education (Simmons et al, 2005; Bourner and Race, 1990; Jacobs, 2002), there has been limited research within the region that seeks to understand male academic underachievement from the perspectives of male students at the tertiary level of education (Joseph et al., 2012). With these challenges facing underachieving male students in St. Lucia, the focus of this research is to understand the underlying factors responsible for male students' academic underachievement in tertiary education. The goal is to provide an in-depth account of students' experiences and perceptions of academic underachievement within a tertiary institution in St. Lucia. It is against this background and the gaps presented in the literature on male academic underachievement that this research is conducted.

1.1.The Context of Education in St. Lucia

St. Lucia, a former British colony, is a stable, democratic, multicultural society that gained independence from Britain in 1979. For over 100 years, the British and French battled each other for control of the island, switching power 14 times (Austin, 2010), before final coming under the control of Britain in 1814 (Orr, 2004). With 238 square miles in size, and a population of approximately 166,526 of which 50.2% are female. St. Lucia is one of the Commonwealth countries and has an ethnic composition of 85.3% Black, 10.9% mixed, 2.2% East Indian and 1.7% unspecified (2010, Government of St. Lucia Estimates). St. Lucia has a youthful population of which 33% are between the ages of 15-35 years, and 24% between the ages of 0-14 years, with a 1:1 male to female ratio (EFA National Report, 2015). Economically, St. Lucia depends heavily on tourism, offshore banking and the service industry. Education in St. Lucia is both publicly and privately managed and begins from early childhood education, through compulsory primary education, universal secondary education and, finally, tertiary education.

St. Lucia's commitment to education is stated in its education Act of 1993, Section 14 on the Rights of Education: 'All persons are entitled to receive an education program appropriate to their needs'. This commitment ensures that compulsory basic education is provided to students between the ages of 5-15 years. Education in St. Lucia is controlled by policy makers who utilise standardised examinations and the curriculum to gauge the quality of education and schools accountability of student performance (Caesar, 2013)

During the colonial period, education in St. Lucia was reserved for plantation owners, members of the white elitist class, the coloured middle class, and the re-enslaved black lower class (Bacchus, 1994). Because of the then degree of social stratification, education did not provide the skills or credentials to allow the masses to move beyond their social level within society (Bacchus, 1994; Bailey, 2009). In 1838, with assistance from the Mico Charity fund and the Negro Education Grant, elementary schools were established. However, at that time, elitist education encouraged the privileging of locality, race, class and language and also encouraged a

curriculum that followed a colonial agenda that was disconnected from the citizenry (Bacchus, 1994). This social stratification legitimised the forms of the St. Lucian social structure and expressions of identity that exist today.

The present structure of education in St. Lucia falls under 4 educational levels, namely: early childhood education, primary education, secondary education and post-secondary/tertiary education. At the completion of each stage of education, students undergo major academic assessments as prerequisites for matriculation to the next level. To transition from the primary level of education to secondary education students must pass the Common Entrance examination (CEE). However, with the implementation of Universal Secondary Education (USE), all students are guaranteed placement into secondary schools on the island. On completion of five years of secondary education, students are assessed through the Caribbean Secondary Examinations (CSE) administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC), the regional examination board. Based on performance, students matriculate into post-secondary/ tertiary education or move onwards into the work environment. The St. Lucian education system is managed by the Ministry of Education with the assistance of ministry officials, curriculum officers and administrators who are responsible for monitoring, evaluating and implementing policy at all levels of the education system.

Early childhood education evolved from the traditional public school system and caters for children between the ages of 0-5 years. It encompasses day care services from 0-2 years, that are both government and privately owned, and pre-school services from 3-4 years of age, that are all privately owned. Prior to 2007, day care services were mainly privately managed and poorly regulated. However, after 2007, day care management was taken over by the Ministry of Education guided by the Education Act of 1999. The Education Sector Development plan of 2009-2014 outlined the development of a framework for inclusive education and increased access to early childhood education among other aspects, as objectives for the improvement of comprehensive early childhood education in St. Lucia (NEFA Report, 2015).

Primary basic education in St. Lucia begins at age 5 and its primary goal is to equip students with basic numeracy and literacy skill, critical thinking skills and creativity. Students at

this level acquire the basic foundation in skills, attitudes and values that prepare them for integration into other levels of learning. There are 75 public primary schools managed by the Ministry of Education and 6 privately owned primary schools, and education at this level is compulsory. While universal primary educational exists in the St. Lucian education system, there has been a decrease in primary enrollment due to a decline of the country's population growth rate over the last decade (NEFA Report, 2015). Prior to 2006, male dropouts were on the rise, but with the introduction of Universal Secondary Education, dropout rates for male students reduced to .02% in 2011/12.

Secondary education commences at age 12 and is managed by the Ministry of Education. Traditionally, access to this level of education was decided by the performance of students at the national common entrance examination, taken after 7 years of basic primary education. However, after the introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2006, students were permitted automatic entry into secondary education. USE paved the way for the development of inclusive education, the implementation of broad-based curricula as well as the introduction of competency-based learning certification programmes inclusive of the Caribbean Vocational Qualification (CVQ), National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) and the Caribbean Certificate of Secondary Level Competence (CCSLC) (NEFA Report, 2015).

Public secondary schooling increased dramatically in 2008/2009 as a result of the implementation of Universal Secondary Education. Prior to Universal Secondary Education, more female students had been enrolled in secondary education, an indication of the high achievement rates for girls at the primary level of education (Common Entrance Examinations). However, with universal access to secondary education the enrollment levels between male and female were on par and the disparities in access between male and female were eliminated (NEFA Report, 2015). While all students had equal access to basic education, poor parenting and societal deficiencies including delinquency and the use of drugs accounted for the level of school dropouts and poor educational performances of male students at that level. At the secondary level of education, it is mandatory that all students acquire competence in mathematics, English and Information Technology. The regional examining body – Caribbean

Education Council (CXC) – administers examinations at the end of the 5 years of secondary education and students have the option of furthering their education to pursue Cambridge studies (GCE-A Level), Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE), Associate Degrees, University education or entering into the labour force.

Post-secondary/tertiary education represents the 4th level of education in St. Lucia, with approximately 42% of secondary school graduates transitioning to this level of education. The term Tertiary education is used interchangeably with Higher education within the Caribbean. Being inclusive, the education provided “include non- university and university level programmes, technical and vocational education and training, professional and paraprofessional training and continuing education programmes”. While institutions within the Caribbean have their own academic standards for admission, students who usually attend these institutions are over the age of 16. This type of education usually occurs following the completion of secondary education, and provides the diverse student body with academic credits and competencies that lead to the delivery of certificates, diplomas and degrees from community colleges, polytechnics, university colleges and universities.

The main tertiary education institution in St. Lucia offers training in areas of nursing, business, hospitality studies, teacher education, technical vocational studies and agriculture. In 2011, strategic educational plans were developed to expand the existing community college to a full-fledged university college by 2015. The university college’s mandate is to deliver community education as well as administration of degrees (SALCC, 2012). The high cost of pursuing tertiary education has however been identified as a challenge for many students seeking access. Financial assistance programs have therefore been introduced to assist students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds experiencing challenges with their educational needs (NEFA Report, 2015).

Students within the St. Lucian education system went through a rigorous examination process, fashioned after the British education system (Jules, 2008), which resulted in the stratification of students into schools based on a ranking system. Prior to 1998, educational testing was oriented towards measurement of student aptitude in an attempt to select

students who would have the opportunity to matriculate to the next level of education (UNESCO 2009). Until then, there were no standardised benchmarks or standards to measure student's mastery of the subjects or any reliable standardised tests to determine student achievement at the primary level of education. In 1998, standardised benchmarks were introduced through the establishment of the Minimum Standards Test (MST) (an instrument used to monitor, assess, and analyse performance results). As a means of quality control, this instrument identified that a high percentage of primary school students performed well below the acceptable standards, which suggested a problem of poor performance of students especially in the areas of numeracy (World Data on Education, 2010/2011). The instrument (MST) also identified that at the secondary level of education, students continued to perform poorly in the area of numeracy with a mean performance of 38.4% in 2007. These standardized tests were mainly conducted to provide educational practitioners and policy makers with the summative information and did not inform the developmental and remedial aspects of education at the level (Caesar, 2013).

The introduction of Universal Secondary Education in 2006/2007 created the pathway to reviewing the lower secondary curriculum to meet the needs of the student population, providing teacher training and creating new learning resource environments to enhance student learning. However, this did not translate into expected student achievement. USE also created access to secondary education based on selective performance outcomes using the criteria related to the available secondary school places and was able to meet its mandate of providing secondary placements to all eligible students. However, USE was unable to balance access with quality, resulting in low student achievement at the secondary levels of education. The selective nature of the education system, undoubtedly, left some students without the opportunity to attend the secondary schools of their choice, creating in essence an inequitable educational system (Lesforis, 2011). Further, it could be seen to promote discrimination against students as some schools deliberately excluded weaker students whom it was perceived would lower the mean performance of the schools (Caesar, 2013).

The Ministry of Education in St. Lucia recognized the importance of education to social promotion and upward mobility, as well as the need for reformation of the education system to ensure equity of access. The Ministry of Education thus set out, as its fundamental aim, 'to raise the level of achievement of all learners' (NEFA 2015 Report). Notwithstanding the Ministry's aim, the performance of male students, especially at the secondary level of education, has been a source of concern for education officials and parents alike.

The tertiary educational institution under study in this research is situated in Castries, the capital city of the Island of St. Lucia. The institution was established with the aim of providing a place of education offering instruction in various disciplines including health sciences, agriculture, arts and general studies, teacher education and technical education and management studies to meet the needs of a dynamic expanding population. Prior to its establishment in 1985, tertiary education in St. Lucia was provided at separate institutions each led by individual management units. The three units focused on catering to the education of teachers, technical and vocational training and Advanced ("A") level certification. While these units were successful in their transfer of knowledge to a growing population, the need to integrate all three educational units was recognized. Based on the recommendations from the educational task force appointed by the government, proposals for the development of a community college were approved, and in 1985, all three units were incorporated under one umbrella. The college admits students who have completed and passed the Caribbean Secondary School examinations administered by the regional examining body, Caribbean Examination Council (CXC).

Students entering this tertiary institution are offered a variety of programmes that lead to certification at Associate Degree, Diploma or Certificate level. The institution has a 'No child left behind' vision that ensures that all qualified students are given equal opportunity to pursue tertiary education, and prides itself on being an open, comprehensive, flexible learning institution that is committed to excellence. The institution offers a diverse curriculum that is designed to meet the needs of both the students and the wider community.

1.2. Statement of the problem

In St. Lucia, boys' underachievement is evident from as early as primary school, and advances into the secondary school level, (MOE, 2009 Report). More boys than girls underachieve at those levels and fail to transition into tertiary institutions as a result of low performance at the secondary level completion of examinations at the Caribbean Examination Council (CXC, 2012). A substantial number of these students remain unproductive and lack the necessary skills to help sustain their economic development, hence putting tremendous stress on an already struggling economy. Of those male students who successfully gain entry into the tertiary level, a significant number of them fail to complete the two-year programme at the institution for a number of reasons, most notably their inability to complete one or more of the prescribed courses required for successful completion.

The Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS, 2010) Reform Strategy Report suggests that on completion of secondary education in St. Lucia, approximately 42% of students' transition into post-secondary education (tertiary education). However, inequality of access and participation exists at the level of post-secondary and tertiary education where enrolment is higher for female students. The low enrolment rates for male students could be attributed to a combination of factors including personal, financial and/or behavioral problems (OECS 2012).

Statistics from the Ministry of Education Report (2010) in St. Lucia, suggests that the drop-out rate in 2008/2009 at the secondary level, according to gender, is 175 males to 80 females. The key reason attributed to the drop-out rate is the tendency of young males to opt out of school in order to seek employment to supplement the income in single parent households. National school aggregate data in St. Lucia also suggest that underachieving males have negative school experiences as a result of the lack of attention from teachers, consistently record low grades, suffer from teacher insensitivity to the economic and social problems faced by male students, and engage in disruptive male classroom behaviour all resulting in their low academic outcomes and continuous school suspensions (2010).

The concerns over the failure of male students to complete their education successfully have increased the importance of examining and understanding the underlying causes of male academic underachievement, so that appropriate learning strategies, other than cognitive tests, can be identified and implemented to change the male student educational experience and outcomes.

This research, therefore, seeks to explore male academic underachievement at a tertiary level in St. Lucia, and to understand the experiences of male students in relation to their learning environment, their perceptions of underachievement, and their perceptions of themselves as learners within their present environment.

1.3. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this research is to explore underachievement of male students at the tertiary level in St. Lucia, and to investigate the contributory factors giving rise to underachievement from the perspectives of the male students themselves. A focused analysis of the findings of this research will be used to assist educational policy-makers, educational institutions, and teachers, to develop appropriate programs to motivate, support, and engage learners in an effort to change learner behaviour and improve learner achievement.

In the English speaking Caribbean region, a significant amount of the research on male academic achievement has revolved around the concept of male marginalisation (Miller, 1986) and gender socialisation (Figuerola, 2004; Chevannes, 1999) as contexts for the poor performance of male students. As such, not much consideration is given to individual internal factors within the learning environment that may indicate possible reasons for underachievement. In most instances, within the Caribbean, academic achievement has been linked to test scores and examination results which generalise the performance of students, without taking into consideration how students conceptualise themselves and their learning environment. In order to understand male academic underachievement in tertiary education

from the perspectives of male students themselves, the following research questions will be addressed:

1.4. Research Questions

The research will essentially seek to accomplish the following objectives in order to understand underachievement: investigate the reasons for academic underachievement at the tertiary level; understand underachievement from the viewpoint of the male students themselves; understand how male students conceptualise and understand themselves as learners; identify solutions to better support, motivate and engage educationally underachieving students to perform better educationally.

In order to explore the experiences of the students, the following questions were used to guide the research:

1. How do male students perceive their educational environment?
2. What are the factors responsible for male academic underachievement at the tertiary education level?
3. To what factors do male students themselves attribute their academic underachievement?

1.5. Overview of Research Design and Methodology

The researcher utilized a case study approach to address the research questions presented in section 1.4 above. The case study provides contextual detail about a phenomenon and captures unique features about a particular situation, which, according to Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2003) may be lost when accessing large scale data, but can be used to enhance the understanding of the particular situation. The advantage of using a case study is that it allows

for engagement within a specific context and makes for a better understanding of the realities and truths experienced by those within the context. Over a three-month period, 30 male students and 8 teachers were involved in the research study. Data for the study were gathered using individual student and teacher interviews and student focus groups interviews.

This research utilised semi-structured interviews to obtain data from both students and teachers. Semi-structured interviews, according to DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree (2006) are “organized around a set of pre-determined open-ended questions with other questions emerging from the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee” (p. 315). In this research, semi-structured individual interviews with male students were used to generate data relating to their understanding of underachievement, and to explore their perceptions of the teaching/learning environment. Semi-structured individual interviews with teachers were also used to garner teachers’ assessment of male students and their perceived underachievement, teachers’ effectiveness and their expectations of male students.

The academic achievements of students vary in complexity. How students perceive and experience their school environment impact significantly on how well they perform within that environment. Consequently, understanding these experiences from the participants’ perspectives puts meaning to their behaviour and explains how that behaviour affects their overall achievement. This is congruent with the views presented under the constructivist epistemology that posits reality as socially constructed, where meanings emerge from engagement with the realities of the world emphasizing a diversity of interpretations that can be applied to explain a phenomenon (Guba and Lincoln, 1989). As realities become the construct of the mind, the different experiences of male students within the learning environment explain how and why they behave in certain ways; In this case, how male students experienced underachievement and how they conceptualised themselves in their learning environment.

The primary methodology in this research was the in-depth individual and focus group interviews with students and the individual interviews with teachers. These were used to generate rich contextual data (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) on students’ experiences in tertiary

education, their perceptions concerning the learning environment, their perceptions of teachers' attitudes toward male students, and finally, students' views of education and career opportunities.

The quantitative approach to data collection, though considered for this research, was not the most appropriate methodology due to its inability to generate information that would adequately represent the lived experiences of the male students. The qualitative approach was considered applicable for this study because of its flexibility of use and its scope for allowing the researcher to understand and interpret underachievement from both students' and teachers' perspectives.

1.6. Significance of the research

This study is essentially a contribution to the existing body of literature on male academic underachievement within the Caribbean context. Thus far, a significant amount of available literature on academic underachievement in tertiary education within the Caribbean has centered on gender differences in different areas of university programmes (Figueroa, 2002; Bailey, 2002; Reddock, 2009). This present research focuses on male academic underachievement at the tertiary level of education, an area of research that has had limited investigation, particularly with regard to male student perspectives. This study provides information pertinent to educational policy development, and the development of appropriate strategies to deal with underachieving learners before they exit the learning environment.

This research seeks to add to the already existing literature on male underachievement by focusing on underachievement of male college students. This study is unique, in that it examines an overlooked population of students who are generally considered academically successful by virtue of being able to attend tertiary/higher education. The study examines the nature of academic underachievement from the viewpoint and perspectives of the male students themselves, giving them a voice to express their own understanding of

underachievement and the factors that have contributed to their underachievement. A fresh perspective on underachievement from the Caribbean region may provide insights into understanding underachievement that could change the way male students are perceived in the learning environment. This could also determine some measures of intervention that could be effectively applied to achieve educational success.

The findings of the present research also provide contributions to challenge the discourse as to whether the existing assumptions used in previous research to explain underachievement are relevant in today's changing environment. This research is significant for educational policy makers as it proffers the opportunity to engage in dialogue with relevant stakeholders about male academic performance, and develop appropriate, practical educational policies that would focus on empowering students' success. The findings of this research will also help college administrators and faculty to review teaching strategies and identify workable ways of encouraging the male student population to improve their performance.

1.7. Motivation and interest in the research

My interest in this research stems from my curiosity regarding the literature on underachievement, influenced by the works of noted Caribbean scholar and writer, Errol Miller (1986), whose seminal work 'Marginalisation of the black male: Insights of the teaching profession', fueled the debate on underachievement within the Caribbean region. The perspectives within the marginalisation theory spurred my interest in discussion and analysis of the reasons why so many boys and young males underachieve academically even though they have the power to change their situation.

My interest also stems from my observations and experiences within the teaching profession, where too many young boys and men seem to have given up on their educational pursuits and have resigned themselves to performing and participating less in secondary and

tertiary levels of education. From their behaviour and attitude, they seem to be disengaged from the reality that education is linked to their life choices, well-being, and economic sustainability, without which they will be unable to participate in productive social and economic development (Battle and Lewis, 2000). Their poor educational attainment perpetuates their poor social and economic outcomes that continue through adulthood, and in many instances, has result in deviant behaviour, and the inability to invest successfully in productive development.

As an educator within the St. Lucian education system, I work closely with students who have been catagorised as underachievers because they have not been able to meet stipulated institutional requirements attained through standardised achievement tests that students complete at the end of primary, secondary and post-secondary education. These students, who are usually male, show signs of demotivation and they disengage from anything school-related and generally do not perform at their optimal levels. Because of this disengagement, male students display attitudes and behaviours that conflict with their learning environment: they are usually unable to concentrate on academic work for long periods of time, display high levels of irritability in and outside of the classroom, and engage in behaviour that leads to violence, crime and increased instances of truancy. Such behaviours have led to national media reports suggesting that too many young men do not possess the skills required to assist them in making rational decisions, and that this would adversely affect their ability to perform academically within the school environment.

My experiences with these students have shown that most of them do not consider the long term value and benefits of acquiring a good education, but are more focused on the financial gain derived from other forms of employment. The desire for positive academic achievement is not considered a priority for some of the students, especially if the outcomes are not seen as enhancing their physical and social status. Unlike female students, most of these young men display poor time management skills, poor study and communication skills that significantly lower their level of engagement and achievement within tertiary education. In the classroom, these young men display negative behaviours toward some teachers whose

teaching strategies and classroom management styles may not be reaching them effectively. This cultivates the belief that male students are being discriminated against within the classroom. Consequently, male students use that argument as a reason for their poor performance and perceived underachievement.

My interest, therefore, in male students' poor performance and underachievement has led to an insatiable quest to explore the reasons for their unsuccessful educational outcomes. I believe that giving male students a voice, understanding their experiences within the learning environment, understanding how they conceptualise themselves as learners and how they respond to the learning environment, are important as such approaches allow for a better appreciation of what affects and impacts on their learning. Through this understanding, appropriate policies and strategies can be developed to help educators and other stakeholders such as ministry officials, education policy makers, and parents, to address male academic underachievement at the tertiary level. The lack of early intervention practices within the system has failed this 'at risk' population which has been allowed to navigate the system with minimal professional help. Understanding students' perceptions of self and their perceptions of the learning environment will provide new insights into the existing literature on why male students underachieve.

1.8. Definition of Key Terms

For the purpose of this research, the following terms will be used:

Underachievement - Many researchers have explained underachievement using the differences between potential and outcome, that is, the difference between individual potential and individual outcomes, where outcomes are measured through standardised achievement test scores and 'exhibit severe discrepancies between expected performance in relation to standardized test scores and

actual performance to class and teachers assignments (Reis & McCoach, 2002, p. 157)

However for the purposes of this research, underachievement is defined as the difference between individual potential and individual outcome, where students with different abilities (high or low) may at some stage of their career development not perform as expected (Smith, 2005). In the context of this research, male students enter tertiary education with varying levels of achievement that are considered acceptable for their program of study, however at some stage during their career development at the tertiary level they experience challenges that impede their performance. As such they do not perform as expected, and this leads to low levels of performance and underachievement.

Social Identity: In this research, social identity is viewed as an individual's perception of who they are or self-concept derived from their membership within the social group and the value placed on that group by society (Tajfel, 2010). Social identities include race, gender, ethnicity, and social class by which individuals are identified by within society. For the purposes of this study, social identity is used to understand how male students define themselves in terms of their social class and how they enact their roles as part of the expectations within the social group, as their concept of self and identification with their social groups influences their educational outcomes. Student identities in this research are affected by both personal and institutional factors; therefore their identities are constantly shifting as they experience different social and educational settings.

Intersectionality - For the purposes of this study, intersectionality is defined as the ways in which various cultural and socially constructed identities intersect on multiple levels, and manifest as inequalities within society, (Ritzer, 2007). These constructed identities which include race, gender, and class do not operate

independently of one another but interrelate simultaneously shaping individual experiences and outcomes.

In the context of this research, intersectionality is relevant because it examines the intertwining of identities (class and gender) that influence male college students' access to power and resources within the social and educational environment, and this has an impact on their ability to achieve academically in tertiary education.

1.9. Overview of the Research

This research is divided into six chapters. The current chapter introduces the study aim, purpose and rationale for the investigation of male academic underachievement in tertiary education. Chapter two, Literature Review, focuses on the theoretic and empirical literature on educational underachievement and explains the main features of Bourdieu's social capital concept which include Habitus, Capital and Field. The concept of habitus and social capital are further elaborated on to provide a better understanding of their interconnectedness and how socialization, masculinity, motivation, socioeconomic background, teacher practices, and peer associations that impact male student academic underachievement. Chapter three, Methodology identifies the research purpose and explains the case study research design chosen to address the research questions. The methods of investigation in the study include individual and focus group interviews and the justification for the use of those methods are presented. The data analysis process that consisted of thematic coding of individual and focus group interviews identified significant information that emerged from the data and are considered in this chapter. Chapter three also presents the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the study. Chapter four and five analyses and reports on data gathered from the interviews with participants, and further provide a discussion of the synthesized data and the empirical literature on academic underachievement. Chapter six presents a summary of the findings, and also evaluates the contributions that these findings have to the development of

new knowledge. The limitations of the study and the implications of the research are presented, followed by recommendations for future research and the way forward for underachieving students in tertiary education.

CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this qualitative case study is to explore the underachievement of male students at a tertiary institution, and to investigate the contributing factors giving rise to underachievement from the perspectives of male students themselves. As such, this chapter provides a review of the theoretical literature and empirical studies linked to the research questions presented in chapter one. The study uses Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus and social and cultural capital to highlight how inequalities within the education context contribute to the underachievement of male learners in the tertiary learning environment, which, in turn, promote disengagement and exclusion.

The chapter begins with an overview of Bourdieu's (1986) concepts of social, cultural and economic capital with particular emphasis on two concepts, namely: habitus and capital, and the relevance of these concepts to the understanding of male students' underachievement in the Caribbean. Second, the chapter develops with a discussion of the concept of habitus used to conceptualise the way in which male students develop attitudes and behaviours within tertiary education that predispose them to underachieve. Third, Bourdieu's theory framework of social and cultural capital is discussed and used to argue that inequalities in society are responsible for male academic underachievement inherent in the learning environment and promote disengagement and exclusion. Fourth the gender socialisation paradigms that form and influence male students' habitus within tertiary education will be discussed with an emphasis on masculine identity and what that means to young males attempting to achieve academically within the Caribbean. This is followed by a discussion on the influence of peer groups and socioeconomic status on male student's habitus. Finally, motivation and how male students are supported in the learning environment through teacher practices and institutional

support will be discussed. The chapter concludes with a summary that articulates the main literature presented in the chapter as per the study research questions.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

This research applies Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital to understand and examine the reasons why male students underachieve academically in tertiary education. Bourdieu's theoretical framework (1986) concerns itself with how social and educational inequalities are contextually produced within and across social fields. This is achieved through the interaction between habitus and the different types of capital; social, economic and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). The section that follows begins with an introduction of the key components of Bourdieu's theory, that is habitus, social capital, cultural capital and field, followed by a discussion on how habitus and capital and how these concepts impact male student experiences in tertiary education.

Using a game as a metaphor for life, Bourdieu explains the nature of prevailing inequalities in education using the concepts of habitus, capital and field which work together to achieve social action (Bourdieu, 1998). From Bourdieu's view point, the resources that individuals have at their disposal and that have value in the game, represent capital (economic, social, cultural), whereas the individuals' disposition or standing within the game represents the habitus and the social environment or the stage in which individuals play the game represents the field.

Bourdieu defines habitus as 'a subjective but not individual system of internalized structure, scheme of perception, conception and actions common to all members of the same group or class' (Bourdieu, 1977 p. 86), or conceptualised differently it is a 'set of dispositions which incline individuals to act and react in certain ways' (1993). Habitus is generated by one's position within the social class, and it is through knowing one's place within the social structure and internalizing it that one becomes aware of what is possible or not possible to achieve (Dumais, 2002). Operating at the level of the subconscious, Bourdieu's concept of habitus is

instrumental in helping individuals understand how to act, behave and think (Connolly, 1997). As such, Individuals of varied habitus engage in different events within different fields that result in differences in the possession of social capital.

Bourdieu's approach to social capital explains how access to various forms of capital are accrued by membership within a network, and how selected groups within society use these networks to achieve personal gain and create inequalities within the system (Bourdieu, 1986). Social capital identifies social participation and network connections that can be used to facilitate advantage and mobility (Bourdieu, 1986). That is, social capital embodies networks of relationships that individuals have. Individuals and groups of individual who have these relationships have greater advantage over other individuals, and are in a better position to acquire further capital, enabling them to achieve academically.

Bourdieu's concept of capital highlights how inequalities of social class are produced and re-produced within the educational institutions. For example, economic capital reproduces educational inequalities through its inherent ability to purchase different forms of advantage and mobility (Archer et al., 2007). That is, individuals who possess the desired capital hold an advantage over those who do not have that capital, as such capital represents a struggle for power and the type of capital possessed by an individual or group of individuals depends on the norms of the group that the individual belongs. Cultural capital embodies the accumulation of cultural knowledge possessed by the dominant class, that is; the values, beliefs, attitudes, habits and educational credentials that are valued and differ from those of the subordinate class (Bourdieu, 1986), and are used to unfairly screen individuals from privileged social positions. Bourdieu views this as the culture of the dominant class being rewarded by the education system that allows those who conform to that culture to achieve academically (Bourdieu, 1986). Consequently, cultural capital plays a central role in embodying societal power relations, as a means of providing a non-economic form of domination and hierarchy (Gaventa, 2003).

Field represents the arena in which the individual plays the game (Bourdieu, 1998), that is, the arenas in which individuals compete for different types of capital (Gaventa, 2003).

Accordingly, a field is a setting, a network, a group or a configuration consisting of similar objective relations, like education (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992), that inform relations through which the dominant social capital groups struggle over resources with subordinates. The field represents the environment where individual interactions occur in relation to the negotiation and manipulation of scarce resources. As such individuals' experiences of power to manipulate such scarce resources will depend on the field in which they are located.

This present research advances the argument that in the absence of social and cultural capital, young males within tertiary education are predisposed to academic failure. In the following section, the discussion of habitus will be used to conceptualise the way in which male students develop attitudes and behaviours within tertiary education that predispose them to academically underachieve.

2.2.1. Habitus

According to Bourdieu (1977) Habitus is 'a subjective but not individual system of internalized structure, scheme of perception, conception and actions common to all members of the same group or class (p. 86), and views habitus as the way 'society becomes deposited in persons in the form of lasting dispositions like trained capacities and even structured propensities to think, feel and act in a given way, which informs the individuals interactions with aspects of life or lenses through which he/she sees it' (Wacquant 2005, p.316). In other words, habitus directs individuals' actions, motives, thoughts and perceptions which govern individual and collective practices (Bourdieu, 1977).

Habitus is formed through the individuals' early socialisation, either within the home, or from other social structures such as the school or from past experiences, as such Habitus becomes an inherited capital derived from experiences of socialization (Bourdieu, 1992). Individuals internalize these experiences and develop an understanding of what is possible and what is not in their lives. Bourdieu (1997) uses 'habitus' to explain how structural inequalities are mediated through the individual. At the individual level, 'habitus' encompasses individual

expectations, attitudes and dispositions which, when internalised with class-based practices, become 'embedded' practices. Individuals within a particular social class have similar dispositions as they internalise norms, ideas and values in the same way. It is through these norms and values that the structure of culture is reproduced (Bourdieu, 1997).

Individual habitus can, however, be modified by new experiences, creating different individual habitus even among individuals of the same social class, as in the case of male students in tertiary education. Habitus is, therefore, structured by individuals' past and present experiences and circumstances, through early socialisation, which fortifies Bourdieu's position that habitus is created and reproduced unconsciously, 'without any deliberate pursuit of coherence ... without any conscious concentration' (Bourdieu, 1984, p. 170). However changes in habitus can be slow to achieve because of its deep rootedness in individual socialization (Swartz, 1997). In Alayan and Yari's (2010) study that examined the habitus of educated Palestinian –Israeli women, it was found that even though these women were highly educated and had the means and knowledge to institute change in habitus, they were unable to do so because of the deep seated patriarchal norms that existed within their society. As such their strong inertia to habitus was viewed as deterrent in instituting change.

Referring to habitus as a 'field for the game' (Bourdieu, 1998, p.25) where agents are able to anticipate how they function within the field of play, individuals who have the appropriate cultural capital in the field of play would have a better chance of success in the game than those without cultural capital (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1997). When individuals understand the field that they are in and are familiar with it, they are in a better position to enjoy social advantage (Grenfell and James, 1998). Alternatively, one's habitus develops in relation to how much cultural capital he or she possesses (Bourdieu, 1973), that is, a person from a lower socioeconomic class is aware that persons from that class tend to have limited cultural capital and that without cultural capital they are unlikely to succeed educationally

In the context of this research, the education system is seen as the field and cultural capital is seen as the currency used within the field. Following this notion, within tertiary education, embedded dispositions may be conceptualized on two fronts: first, students from

low socioeconomic backgrounds are predisposed to certain habitus acquired as a result of their embedded practices that may not be favourable for success, and second, the cultural capital valued by educational institutions favours the dominant class thereby reinforcing the habitus of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds and leading to lower success rates and lower expectations by both teachers and students. In both cases, individuals and groups internalize their behaviour to fit within their structured surroundings, which determines how successful they are at acquiring the values of the structured surroundings, (in this case, the educational institution), and their level of performance within the structure.

In terms of educational opportunities, Reay, David and Bell (2005) argue that inequalities continue to be reinforced by educational institutions. The concept of 'habitus', they contend, reinforces the reproduction of expected practices as students enter higher education. Consequently, students with habitus from middle class backgrounds will be more engaged in the process of higher education, while those disadvantaged by social class will be removed from academic engagement. From this vantage point, the dominant class (those from middle class backgrounds) has the power within the field to determine value which, in turn, assists with their acquisition and maintenance of prestige (Bourdieu, 1986). As the dominant class has the power, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds are disadvantaged, as they do not possess the cultural capital inherited through the habitus acquired within the home environment. Institutions therefore fortify social class distinction among students by legitimizing and accepting the values and norms of the dominant class, that lead to educational and economic success (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2002). The consequence therefore of not aligning with the values and expectations of the dominant class is the perpetual positioning of the lower class in their traditional societal class (Grenfell, 2008).

Relatedly, Paton (2007) argues that working class students are acutely aware of what to expect in education institutions. However, these expectations, based on their internalised habitus, may present a level of uncertainty if the outcomes are negative. This view falls in line with Bourdieu's theory of social capital which shows that the disadvantaged classes tend to "self-eliminate" themselves from participating in tertiary education if they are uncertain of the

final outcome. For example, the UK study by Archer et al., (2001) that focused on how working class men who belonged to the disadvantaged class of social and cultural capital accessed tertiary education, showed that male students were reluctant to change their identities so as to gain entry to tertiary education. This argument links to Bourdieu's concept of self-elimination. If an individual's habitus is presented with an unfamiliar field, it may result in uncertainty and insecurity (Reay, David & Ball, 2005). Reay's (2001) research that examined working class students as one of the underrepresented groups within higher education showed that the students' were confused as to the persons they were supposed to be, or the class that they belonged to, while the middle class students did not have to deal with the same fears or uncertainties.

Institutional habitus also shapes students' interactions within the education field (Reay *et al.*, 2001). The authors contend that institutions have identifiable habitus of practices that influence students' day-to-day actions. However, how students position themselves in relation to the institutional habitus is determined by the congruence of their familial habitus. It is therefore argued that habitus helps conceptualise how social structures and individual agency can interact, forming dispositions 'shaped by society and individuals' past events and structures that eventually shape current practices and individual behaviour' (Bourdieu, 1984, p.170). Individuals influence the particular fields that they occupy and operate in while concurrently being influenced by their own habitus (Robbins, 2004).

Parallels can be drawn between Reay's (2001) research and Bourdieu's habitus concept which suggests that the working class groups in higher education encounter unfamiliar fields which predispose them to institutional disengagement as rationalised in the analysis by Reay *et al.* (2005). Habitus, then, is indicative of the fact that an individual's social identity is core to the formation of aspirations in the higher education context (Burke, 2012). Thus, it could be argued that habitus is linked to individual identity formed by the relationships that exist through language, personal histories and cultures (McCarthy and Moje, 2002).

Bourdieu's concept of habitus and cultural capital has not gone without criticism. Jenkins (1992) has argued that student's educational pursuit is informed by social reality, and not objective probabilities as envisaged by Bourdieu. Jenkins further argues that the concept of habitus in academic pursuit is nebulous as it makes gross assumptions that students' academic desire is a result of social construction, rather than individual agency. Further, Bourdieu fails to acknowledge the progressive nature of values and attitudes based on social and environmental realities. This means that even if students from low social capital backgrounds encounter opportunities, they are permanently crippled to make attitudinal and values adjustments to take advantage of the opportunities (King, 2002). Researchers have challenged the Bourdieusian approach for not explaining adequately why individuals from low-socioeconomic backgrounds successfully access and participate in higher education. In essence, Bourdieu fails to bridge the gap between agency and structure. Bourdieu's framework fails to take into account persons who can change their habitus through experience or otherwise, or obtain the cultural capital required to move to a different social class (Jenkins, 2002). King (2000) also puts forward the argument that the deterministic nature of the Bourdieu theoretical framework often discredits the individual's capability to intervene. While Jenkins (2002) supports King's (2000) conclusions, he argues that the Bourdieusian approach delineates a world where 'things happen to people, rather than a world in which they can intervene in their individual and collective destinies' (Jenkins, 2002 p.91).

Bourdieu's theory has also been challenged for not accepting that particular forms of culture can be derived from other notions of appropriateness or relative value (Goldthorpe, 2007). In essence, Goldthorpe highlights that culture is not always inherent, but can be derived from real or perceived value. As such, he argues that Bourdieu's theory of social capital is not conclusive, as it negates intrinsic impetus by students to achieve or underachieve regardless of the students' habitus. Further, Bourdieu's assertions that the inherent familial capital of individuals determines educational achievement and success, is challenged as inaccurate, as individual educational trajectories may not necessarily be dependent on familial capital (Nash, 1990).

While Bourdieu's concept of habitus has been criticized for being extremely complex and ambiguous and difficult to implement (Sullivan, 2002), habitus in the context of this

research provides a useful framework because it explains how students internalize their chances of success or failure based on their identification with their social class, as well as their cultural and economic backgrounds. Habitus shapes students' perceptions, attitudes and behaviours, giving them a sense of why and how they do things. Hence habitus is used to conceptualise the way in which male students develop attitudes and behaviour within tertiary education that predispose them to underachieve.

2.2.2. Social and Cultural Capital

This research uses Bourdieu's theory framework of social and cultural capital to argue that inequalities in society are responsible for male academic underachievement inherent in the learning environment that promotes disengagement and exclusion. Operating within the Marxist view of social capital, Bourdieu (1986) a French sociologist, interested in understanding the nature of power relations within society, puts forward a concept that examines how society is reproduced and how dominant actors within society retain their positions. From his point of view, Bourdieu conceptualises the relationship between social differences within society and social capital that results in inequalities within the education system. Bourdieu's social capital emphasis to education is based on the reproduction of unequal relations and opportunities within society that lead to economic disadvantage of individuals.

Bourdieu defines social capital as the "the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition" (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992, p.119). Based on this definition, two key characteristics of the networks can be extrapolated. First, the size of the network which represents the social relationships and the resources connected to those relationships, that is the structural characteristics of the networks and, second, the volume of capital associated with those relationships; that is, the amount of social capital possessed by other members within the network. With regard to the size of the network, Bourdieu stresses on the content of the resources and its accessibility to individuals within the network, which suggest that some members within the network may be

excluded from accessing resources within the network, which identifies a negative aspect of social capital (Carpiano, 2006).

Bourdieu's Social capital concept explains how access to various forms of capital are accrued by membership within a network, and how selected groups within society use these networks to achieve personal gain and create inequalities within the system (Bourdieu, 1986). The resources connected to those social relationships and, the volume of capital associated with those relationships are important for this research because it is through these networks (parents, family) that young men are influenced positively or negatively about education and upward mobility. Bourdieu articulates that access to resources is differently distributed among actors that constitute a degree of exclusion of some actors within the network. Bourdieu's social capital concept therefore emphasises the power dimension in which social relations increase the ability of individuals to improve their outcomes.

Ball (2008) posits that social capital influences the different ways specific groups use network relationships to attain personal gain. This view aligns with Bourdieu's (1986) conceptualization of social capital. Some social groups can negotiate and defend their privileged positions within post-secondary or tertiary education based on the acquisition of legitimate social and cultural capital. Accordingly, male students would emulate the social class and conditioning espoused by their families, and those who have access to their parents' networks would be in a greater position to access and participate in education to emulate the social conditioning of the class they are thrust into. In essence, before students form their own social networks and social capital, they rely on their parents' social capital. It is for this reason that Bourdieu states: "The volume of social capital possessed by a given agent depends on the size of the network of connections that one can effectively mobilize" Bourdieu (1986, p.249). Social capital therefore continuously operates to reproduce hierarchies that privileges one group from another, as the hierarchies of networks are designed to discriminate against the disadvantaged within society (Bourdieu, 1986).

Bourdieu further argues that parents' social capital can present a level of advantage or disadvantage. For example, parental involvement in a child's education increases the potential for improved educational outcomes, as seen in Carbanaro's (2005) study. That study showed that students were less likely to drop out of school when one's parent interacted with other parents within the child's class. This showed the extent to which parental social capital influenced students' educational outcomes. However, students' cultural capital may be formed outside of parents' cultural capital. In this regard, a student's cultural capital and academic underachievement is independent of parent's social capital, as espoused by Bourdieu (1986).

While Bourdieu (1986) rationalises that social capital relationships are useful to individuals because these relationships allow individuals' access to resources possessed by those to whom they are connected, he argues that social capital is possessed by all social groups, but that the benefits of that capital accrue more to the higher socioeconomic class who have access to both economic and social capital. Bourdieu's (1989) argument, elucidates that individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds possess less social capital as a result of their social class and class habitus and emphasizes that within education, privilege and inequalities prevail as a consequence of the failure of institutions to recognize the varying cultural and linguistic competencies held by agents and their levels of familiarity with the dominant culture, referenced as cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986).

Cultural capital on the other hand can precipitate an unfair education system which is biased towards those students possessing inherited cultural capital (Leese, 2010). The impact of cultural and social capital can be seen even before students enroll in the formal education system, as students are less knowledgeable, and less confident to make informed educational choice (Vryonides, 2007). That being the case, if male students lack appropriate social or cultural capital, their experience of entering new learning environments can be severely affected (Reay et al., 2002). If a male student grows up in a culture or setting where educational expectations are low, this can greatly influence the student's self-concept.

In Bourdieu's view, education is not meritocratic, that is, education reproduces a society divided by class wherein educational institutions provide educational opportunities to the dominant class, alienating those from the lower social class as they do not have access to valued resources as the dominant classes do (Bourdieu, 1986; Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). With respect to the dominant class in the educational context, Bourdieu's belief is that when the dominant class possesses the right cultural capital, it is easier for them to function in the learning environment, thereby leading to higher levels of academic success (Dillon, 2010; Bourdieu, 1986). In contrast, ignorance of the right cultural capital by the lower social class inhibits their participation in education which leads to lower levels of academic success (Dillon, 2010). It is argued therefore that educational institutions play a pivotal role in producing and reproducing social inequalities and unequal relations of power within society (Ricento, 2005). The unequal distribution of social and cultural capital also affects individual's self-esteem (Steinfeld, Ellison and Lampe, 2008) as well as individual's level of self-efficacy (Epcacan and Epcacan, 2010).

Bourdieu's (1986) concept of cultural capital is useful, especially in tertiary/higher education, where the possession of cultural capital, such as higher level linguistic skills and engagement with the dominant class, is necessary for success. However, in order to acquire such cultural capital, "students must have the ability to receive and internalize it" (Dumais, 2002, p.44). Possession of the right cultural capital creates ease of transition and function in the learning environment which, in turn, leads to higher levels of academic success (Dillon, 2010). In the absence of appropriate cultural capital, students from low socioeconomic backgrounds feel alienated from the established norms of the academic institution (Aries and Seuder, 2005), which accounts for their unsuccessful academic outcomes. This highlights the presence of educational inequalities where educational achievements are reinforced by the education system that has preference for students with the right cultural capital (Dumais, 2002).

In as much as Bourdieu's social capital is critical in assessing and determining the factors that influence the underachievement of male students in tertiary education, the theory has limitations in scope and application. For instance, Bourdieu's analysis of social capital

emphasizes the individual and pays almost no attention to the collective. Bourdieu's view of social capital is therefore viewed as egocentric because as Siisiainen (2003) points out, Bourdieu "excludes from his theory even the idea of 'genuine' consensus and universal values whose central function is to maintain it in everyday practices" (23). His emphasis is very much on the use of networks to exclude non-members and prevent social mobility (Swartz 1997). Bourdieu's social capital also assumes that social strata's are static and there is no interdependency or intermingling between various social classes. According to Field (2008), Bourdieu's approach to social capital is greatly rooted in 'a relatively static state mode of social hierarchy' (Field, 2008 p.20). Field positions that Bourdieu places significant emphasis on the individual aspect of social capital, focusing mainly on how privileged individuals maintain positions of power and superiority and how the disadvantaged are impacted by the social hierarchies. As such Field argues that Bourdieu's approach "virtually allows for a dark side for the oppressed, and a bright side for the privileged (Field, 2008 p. 31).

While it is argued that the mechanism for the construction of social capital in Bourdieu's account appears to be elusive (Edwards and Foley 2001), the social reproduction thesis put forward by Bourdieu (1986) has received empirical support from quantitative and qualitative studies, (James et al., (2012), Carbonaro (2005), Raey et al., 2009). For instance in Carbonaro's (2005) study, emphasis was placed on the influence of parental social capital on student educational outcomes. Assuming that parental involvement measures the extent of their social capital, evidence from that study pointed to a generally positive effect of parental social capital on the offspring's educational outcome.

Though Bourdieu's social capital perspective situates social capital in social networks, other strands of social capital address its formation from a different lens as discussed in the following section.

2.2.3. Alternative Views of Social Capital

Other researchers have viewed social capital from a different lens to that of Bourdieu. James Coleman (1988) viewed social capital as the norms, attitudes and resources associated with a structure and defines social capital as “a variety of different entities that consist of some aspect of the social structure that facilitate certain actions of actors, whether person or corporate actors, within the structure” (98-99). In other words, social capital is defined by its structure and involves actors across various entities. According to Coleman, social capital is used to attain a particular goal which actors would not have been able to attain without it. In other words he views social capital as being productive.

Adopting the functionalist view that social action is conditioned by social structure, Coleman posits that embeddedness in social structure is a necessity, a notion adopted from Granovetter (1985). Unlike other forms of capital, that is, human and financial capital, Coleman identifies social capital as basically residing in the social structure of relationships among people that acts as a link or bonding mechanism within the social structure. As such, Coleman pays special attention to the combination of the various differences of social identity within the social structure to describe social capital. Unlike Bourdieu’s concept, Coleman positions that the even though differential power arises from the differences in social capital, these differences do not result or cause inequalities. Bourdieu positions that social capital is a scarce resource that reproduces structural inequalities within society; as such he views social capital as the investment used by the dominant class to preserve the groups’ dominant position (Lin, 1999). Coleman however views social capital as having the inherent ability to benefit all actors within the social structure, as the contributions of social capital of members benefit the whole. Coleman positions social capital as a form of positive social control that embodies trust, information channels, and norms as characteristics of the collective.

Coleman uses social capital to highlight the differences in individuals’ chances of improving their human capital and improving both themselves and the society at large (Coleman, 1988). Using his own longitudinal study of the performance of a selection of high

school students, Coleman revealed that students performed better in private Catholic schools than those in public schools. The difference was attributed to the high degree of social and emotional support that those students received from their families as well as the maintenance of close relationship between parents of students and the schools which encouraged student academic achievement (Coleman, 1988).

Coleman's concept of social capital has been subject to criticism in that he views social capital as resources within the structure of relationships. Portes and Landolt (1996) argue that Coleman confuses the relationships of social capital with resource opportunities that are derived from the social capital. This would suggest for instance that within education those students who remain in college possess social capital that allows them to improve their human capital while those who drop out of college do not have that social capital. In addition, Tzanakis (2003) also suggests that Coleman's concept fails to show the link between parental involvement and students educational outcomes, and argues that there may be other factors that would explain that link apart from social capital that generate the closeness of family ties.

Unlike Bourdieu, Coleman views social capital as existing within social relationships and not exclusively owned by the individual albeit that it is viewed as a resource for individuals within a network. Further, the social relationship within the networks establish high levels of trust, facilitated by the channels of information and sanctions imposed on the members of the group (Tzanakis, 2013). According to Coleman (1986), social capital exists in different social networks such as families, groups and existing close communities, and not just within class-based networks as espoused by Bourdieu (1986).

Robert Putnam's view of social capital has to some degree been influenced by the theoretical principles provided by Coleman. Putnam defines social capital as "features of social organizations such as networks, norms and trust that facilitate action and corporation for mutual benefit" (Putnam, 1993, p.35). Putnam positions that the amount of trust within the collective characterizes the culture of modern societies, as social networks generalize trust across societies, and believes that "working together is easier in a community blessed with a substantial stock of social capital" (1993, p.35-36). Social networks links agents of similar power

together and connect unequal agents in relations of hierarchy and dependence. These links are referred to as the horizontal and vertical relationships that facilitate collective action (Putnam, 1993). Horizontal relationships such as those found in clubs and associations, facilitate collective interaction and engagement with their members on an equal level which allows for the development of trust and mutual respect (Putnam et al., 1993). Based on the level of reciprocity and trust developed within these relationships, Putnam asserts that horizontal relationships possess a high amount of social capital which helps determine the success of the networks.

However, a limitation of Putnam's social capital concept is that it fails to show any empirical evidence that people who have trust in each other and working collectively through network association would lead to social capital for the whole or collective (DeFillipis, 2001). Accordingly Putnam fails to acknowledge individuals subjective understandings that are important in shaping the meanings derived from those relationships (Edwards et al., 2003). Additionally, Portes and Landolt (1996) argue that Putnam's focus on social capital has been severely skewed to the benefits of social capital and neglects to pay attention to the inherent limitations of social capital, in particular how it promotes social exclusion.

While the frameworks of Coleman and Putnam are instrumental in providing insights into the nature of social capital, this research however focuses on Bourdieu's concept of social capital to explain the nature of inequalities within tertiary education that influence male academic achievement.

2.2.4. Bonding and Bridging Social Capital

While the benefits of social capital are stressed in the positive relationships that members have with a network, some researchers have argued that these benefits do not accrue to non-members who are restricted entry into a group (Portes, 1998) as such, Bonding and Bridging social capital have been viewed as suitable in characterizing multiple dimensions

of social identity that support and constrain members and non-members of a group (Putnam, 2001). Bonding social capital refers to the resources that are acquired from relationships with members of a social group that engender the perception of shared identity (Jetten et al., 2014), similar to the concept of strong ties as espoused by Granovetter (1973). Bonding social capital explicates the ties between individuals who know each other within the community (network closure), which lead to individual and group benefits (Putnam, 1995). These relationships, which are associated with family and friends, provide social support that reinforces member identity among homogeneous groups (Field, 2003). The high degree of network closure between individuals within the same group assists members in enhancing their socioeconomic positions and encourages upward mobility. Warren et al., (2001) views the academic institution as a bonding institution that allows for the integration of individuals into society, as such the schools bond individuals together, guiding them towards the achievement of their educational outcomes (Warren et al., 2001 p.11). Bonding capital emboldens a sense of belonging within the group, as strong ties create relationships between members that engender strong mutual commitments. However these strong ties within a group may prevent members from making connections with others outside of the group which encourages social exclusion (Granovetter, 1983).

Similarly, links that are formed through associations with members outside of the network that provide access to new resources and information, characterize bridging social capital (Brunie, 2009), and represents weak ties associated with Granovetter's (1973) strong and weak ties of social networks. Bridging capital represents ties within social groups where individuals are able to access the network resources of other social groups, and relies on trust and reciprocity (Putnam, 2001), as such it provides access to resources which may be beneficial to other actors outside of the normal social environment. In other words it describes relationships that are inclusive.

According to Putnam (2000) bridging social capital engages people across different social groupings (gender, age, social class, ethnicity, race), and allows these different social groups to socialize and provide the social capital that some of the members of other social groups would

not have or gain from. The bonds within these relationships represent ties connecting friends and acquaintances that provide access to resources that would normally not be provided through bonding ties such as close friends and family units, as such these types of networks are useful especially in terms of assisting with employment opportunities (Granovetter, 1973). While bridging ties are not as strong as those reflected in bonding relations they do provide access to information that encourages identity development (Putnam, 1993). Both bonding and bridging forms of social capital can be used to highlight how academically underachieving male students can use networks to enhance their educational outcomes in positive ways.

Within the learning environment bridging and bonding social capital impact the educational outcomes of students, for instance if bonding social capital is viewed as more valuable to students, than there is the expectation of a positive association between educational outcomes and homogeneity of the network. Relatedly, based on the above, there would also be a positive relationship between family social capital and student educational achievement. On the other hand, if bridging capital is more valuable to the student, a negative association between educational outcomes and homogeneity of the network would exist, and family networks would have little to no influence on student academic outcomes.

Bourdieu's social capital theory is used in this research to focus on three different components, namely: networks, trust and individual networks, and related social norms. Firstly, network, in this regard, is used to imply the linkages within relationships in groups, such as family members, friends, and colleagues, who share the same norms, or social status. This structural perspective of networks within social capital strata emphasises the interlinkages within a social structure in which an individual operates (Lin, 2008). Consequently, social capital, in this context, focuses on network characteristics and the position of the individual within the network, determining how this social network influences the individual, or how the individual's perspectives are shaped by the social network group. In context, networks and the position of individuals within these networks will be used to explain how socioeconomic status, linked through family background, family income, and parental occupations, explains male student underachievement in tertiary levels of education.

Secondly, it examines the characteristics inherent in the social relationships. One such characteristic is the presence of trust (Lin, 2008). Several authors have argued that not all network relationships are conducive to social capital in determining influence of interlinkages, but only those social relationships characterized by trust and reciprocity among individuals (Beard, 2007). This means that, for an individual to exert influence within a social group, he/she must have the trust of the group and vice versa. A study by James et al., (2013), argued that social capital construct is predicated upon social participation and connection through trust and reciprocity such as membership of networks, groups and communities. However, even though trust and reciprocity are vital elements that facilitate the understanding of learning identities for males, trust and reciprocity are not constituent elements of Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. In the context of the present research, the social relationships inherent in the constructs of motivation, teacher-student relationships, and stereotype threat, will be examined in light of Bourdieu's (1986) field and habitus concepts to explain the reasons for male academic underachievement in tertiary level education.

The third focus is on the link between individual networks and the related social norms within the social strata in which the individual lives. The attempt inherent in this perspective is to capture the components of community and individuals' association, that is, what links the association, what informs interaction, motivation, and sense of purpose (Putnam, 2001). Social capital theory, therefore, enables the understanding of students' belongingness to groups, and what components, traits, and norms influence and shape their academic achievement.

2.2.5 Structure and Agency in the Learning Environment

The structure –agency approach is an important way of considering and analyzing issues within society and confronting the social problems of human connection (Archer, 1996), it therefore concerns itself with understanding the extent to which individuals have the ability to shape their behaviour as against the extent to which individual lives are shaped and governed by structure. Different ontological perspectives within sociological discussions are used to understand the relationship that exists between structure and agency (Giddens, 1979, 1984: Coleman, 1986: Archer, 2007), with the central tenets in these discussions being whether structure and agency are dependent or interdependent of each other.

The structure –agency debate center on the notion as to whether individual are free to act as they please or are their behaviours shaped and governed by outside forces. With these fundamental philosophical concerns, scholars such as Coleman, Giddens and Archer have developed different theoretical positions to address the concerns presented in the “structure-agency” debate as discussed below. Both agency and structure have been positioned as independent perspectives that impact social life and individual conduct. However a dialectical relationship between structure and agency has also emerged as an important perspective in determining individual conduct (Giddens, 1984).

Agency, which embodies individual human actors, is viewed as the “capacity that individuals or groups have to change or affect their environment intentionally or otherwise” (Bandura, 2001). Based on individuals past and or present experiences, individuals have the free will to make choices that allow them to take control of the social relationships that exist within their environments, as such they “intentionally make things happen by their actions” (2001, p.2) and reflect on and take account of the success and failure of their actions. Intentionality and reflexivity, Archer (2007) argues, explains individual behaviour, in that individuals act with intention and then assume a position of reflection upon the action. Similarly, Giddens (1976) positions that, agency is the “stream of actual or contemplated causal interventions of corporeal beings in the ongoing process of events in the world,” (p.75) and as

such, agents possess causal powers that allow them the choice to mediate the processes of social events.

Coleman (1986) views individuals as guided by rewards and constraints imposed on them by their social environment. Thus, Coleman posits that the changes inherent within society are as a consequence of the actions and behaviours of individuals within society. He attributes this to the relationships around the agents and the hierarchy that are formed from those existing relationships, emphasizing the actions of the individuals without consideration of the social structures that surround them. He therefore views agency as a separate and independent from structure.

Structure on the other hand, embodies conditions that produce human actions or behaviours, and relates to the context which set the range of actions that are available to the agent, as such it encompasses 'rules and resources, or sets of transformation relations, organized as properties of social systems' (Giddens, 1984 p.25). According to Giddens, the existence of rules causes individuals to behave and react in certain ways. As such structures are viewed as social or cultural patterns that can enhance or inhibit individual's ability to change their environment (Connors, 2015). The structure approach surmises that individual behaviour is a product of structural factors, suggesting that specific conditions produce human behaviour, and individuals act not of their free will but through the constraints and structures in which they live. That is, individual actions respond to the structure in which they are situated presenting "various opportunity and constraints" (Neumann et al., 2006, p.94). As such, it could be argued that various structures such as gender, class and race influence individual behaviours, and predict life changes. The structure approach considers social structures such as gender, class and race as universal systems in which individuals have no choice but to operate within.

Giddens (1979), concern with the agency-structure perspective however, is connecting the notion of human action with structural explanations. If prominence is given to structure independently, the implications would be that agents are controlled by the structural conditions, while agency prominence would remove the importance of structure and render

the functions of institutions unnecessary (Giddens, 1979). Giddens (1984) however views agency and structure as interrelated and mutually dependent in that, structure exists through agency, where agents embody rules and resources which facilitate or constraint their actions. In his view of structuration, Giddens argues that the actions of agents are embedded in social contexts which influence the choices that individuals make. Giddens therefore proposes the presence of a dialectal relationship between structure and agency which attempts to bridge the gap created between the distinct and separate views of structure and agency.

It is evident from the above discussion that neither structure nor agency completely controls individual behaviour. Thus, in the context of this research it is argued that academic underachievement of male students cannot adequately be explained by examining their access to or limitations of social and cultural capital alone, as students themselves, through their self-reflective, intentional actions and interactions within their environments have the ability to shape their behaviour, allowing them to transform and take control of the relationships within those environments (Biesta, 2008). Students' behaviour is also shaped by the highly structured institutional context which embodies conditions that enable and or constrain student behaviour (ibid).

Within the context of this research, students themselves are considered as having agency. Through their intentional actions, individually and collectively, they exercise agency by influencing the decisions about their choices within the educational environment. Students' having superior skills and knowledge about their environments make better judgements about the socio-structural context, and make better decisions on how to achieve desired outcomes (Klemenčič, 2015). Consequently, students contextualize their interactions and social experiences by relating past experiences and future orientations to the present situations (Biesta, 2008). Their views, assumptions, self-confidence, notions of their own abilities and the understanding of their circumstances affect agency (Connors, 2015), and influences how they respond within the learning environment.

The interdependent educational, social, cultural and economic conditions present within the students social environments also present constraints and opportunities that challenge

student agency (Klemenčič, 2015). For instance, students can be constrained or enabled by the social structures such as the curriculum, structure of the timetables or even the relationships that they have with their teachers, as shown in this research. At the same time, the cultural structures are expressed in the way knowledge is categorised and organised within the subjects taught which also influence student agency (Connors, 2015).

Recognising structure and agency in this research is useful, as it provides a contextual framework within which male academic underachievement in tertiary education can be explained; not only from the position of student and teacher perspectives but also through the interconnectedness of teacher-student agency and institutional structure.

The dialectal interplay between structure and agency as discussed above can also be recognised through the systems of socialisation, which help shape individual behaviours and explain how individuals respond within their social, cultural and educational environments. In the following section, gender socialisation and masculinity related to social norms within social strata will be discussed and used to explain how male students in tertiary education conceptualise themselves as learners.

2.3. Socialisation and educational underachievement

Referencing gender and education in the Caribbean, Bailey (2002) identifies three aspects to the gender socialisation paradigm, namely: gender stereotyping, inequalities in access, and patterns of curriculum participation, that form and influence students' habitus. The nature of gender socialisation present in the Caribbean influences the education system, producing inequalities in access to education and plays a role in determining student academic success or failure. These assertions by Bailey link habitus and socialisation in that socialisation helps shape individual habitus over time and aligns with Bourdieu's concept of habitus. Drawing on Bourdieu's (1986) concept of 'habitus', roles within a given social group form systematic associations of a negative or positive attribution that is purely based on gender. As a result,

over time, these gender roles form gender stereotypes that define the habitus through which roles, expectations, and gender responsibilities are interpreted (Eckert & Imhof, 2012).

Habitus that is formed, based on gender, is perceived through physical characteristics of male and female students, role-related behaviours either at home or at school, personality traits, specific competencies, and emotional dispositions (Deaux and Lafrance, 1998: 793). Some of these roles have been alluded to by Figueroa's (2004) research on Caribbean socialisation and cultural expectations in which he argues that girls, due to social conditioning, develop a system of interaction, activity, and expectations which form the habitus that enhances their ability to comply with the demands made by institutions for academic achievement. These differentiated roles define the power structure within the home, the space, and activities that are privileged as male, and those that are privileged as female, and explain the cultural norms and values which privilege certain members of a group within the social environment (Figueroa, 2004). It can, therefore, be argued that these differentiated roles reflect Bourdieu's social capital concept that any form of inequality that confers distinction and privileges to groups that possesses it, leads to social disparities in opportunities and societal privileges (Bourdieu, 1989).

Evers and Mancuso's (2006) study on gender academic differentials revealed that practices within Caribbean homes shape an incongruous gender identity that influences academic underachievement. Males are not given adequate responsibilities at home that would instill discipline, hard work and focus, while girls are. In as much as Figueroa (2004) argues that the self-discipline taught to females enabled them to navigate the education system much more easily than males, he does not articulate the extent to which this societal silent expectation of males and manhood are carried over by male students when they get into tertiary institutions of learning. It is, therefore, important to examine how these expectations influence male academic outcomes in tertiary education.

Stereotype-based expectations of males can have self-fulfilling effects on academic behaviour that create social problems by virtue of accumulated distorted beliefs over time (Buchanan and Hughes, 2009). The qualitative study of stereotypes and underachievement of

students by Woolf et al., (2008) found that teacher perceptions of students strongly influenced students' performance. The study suggested that the existence of a negative stereotype from teachers about a group raised the chances of a stereotype threat, and reduced student learning, jeopardising student-teacher relationships. Similarly, Steele & Aronson's (1995) study on stereotype threat and intellectual test performance of African-American males, assessed stereotype vulnerability of black participants to racial stereotypes about intellectual ability. The authors concurred that while black students underperformed in ability diagnostic conditions, as opposed to non-diagnostic conditions, against white students, the mere salience of the stereotype that black students may not perform well on ability diagnostics, affected black students' performance. The results of their study show that once students have knowledge or concern about a stereotype they behave in ways that conform to that negative threat.

Davis (2002) associates gender and habitus as emanating from negative teacher attitude towards male students. Male students are treated differently and lower academic results are expected from them, leading to cases of self-fulfilling prophecies as envisaged in Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory. Though teachers may not consciously show these differences, subtle messages are conveyed in the classrooms which allow disruptive male behaviour to go unchecked (Figueroa, 2002). These studies articulate that within the Caribbean, roles within a given social group form systematic associations that define the habitus through which male roles and expectations are interpreted and which have an influence on the educational achievements of male students in tertiary education. Male students tend to develop forms of masculinity which oppose the demands for schooling, for instance, lack of discipline, focus, and attitude, which lead to underachievement (Eckert and Imhof, 2012). These stereotypical views of male behaviour are not only entrenched within the home environment, but also within institutions of learning, where male students' misbehaviour has been allowed to continue partly due to the reluctance to curb the bad tendencies of traditional masculinity that endanger male identity (Figueroa, 2004).

2.4. Masculinity, identity and Underachievement

The perception of masculinity in the Caribbean society has been viewed as a contributing factor to male underachievement (Jones & Myhill, 2004; Jha & Kelleher, 2006; Skelton, 2001). Figueroa (2004) suggests that young men act in ways that may be harmful to them on account of cultural, social and or economic conditions that may not allow them to fulfil a culturally traditional hegemonic masculine role resulting in a male identity crisis (Weaver-Hightower, 2003). Jha and Kelleher (2006) view masculinity as typically associated with the 'male capacity to hide emotion', a display of physical and mental toughness and a rejection of any form of femininity.

Drawing from Bourdieu's (1986) social capital theory, the concepts of race, ethnicity and class are significant to the understanding of masculinities and the theorizing of masculinity as hegemony and multiple identities. Within the tertiary institutions, masculinities are developed and the acceptance of those masculinities plays a very critical role in how young males access higher education and the labour market. Research by Harper and Davis (2012) shows that black male students, in particular, identify the academic institution as a social institution that 're-inscribe[s] hegemonic power structures' that helps construct cultural identities that go contra to the need for academic achievement (p.106). In other words, when male students reinforce their hegemonic power structures within the academic institution through interactions with their peers, they resist participation in academic success in an attempt to align with, and protect, their cultural identities.

It is therefore argued that masculinity does not traverse across all cultures and the interpretation of what it is to be a 'man' is complex and multifaceted (Jones & Myhill, 2004). Male students actively construct behaviours within their immediate environments that allow them to formulate their identity that informs their behaviour even in tertiary institutions (Jha & Kelleher, 2006). Barriteau (1998) reveals that within the Caribbean context, gender identities are socially constructed and gender ideologies reveal the role that societal expectations have on how males construct their identity. Socialisation and societal masculine expectations have

become synonymous with masculine identity within the Caribbean as, from a very young age, children are socialized along gender lines via messages from religious institutions which strive to ensure that the concept of gender is understood as the key to social intervention and acceptance within a gendered society (Davis, 2003). To this end, Bailey *et al.* (2002) explain:

The culture demanded physical responses from boys and made toughness the hall mark of the real man. Young boys know that if they perform outside the expected traditional roles, they would be ridiculed and labelled as sissy by both boys and girls (Bailey, Branche & Henry-Lee, 2002, p. 8).

Because agents (parents, teachers, role models, and peers) constantly put masculinity under scrutiny, male students find themselves confined to masculine standards for conformity, and these standards or codes are eventually, over time, filtered into tertiary institutions of learning. These codes govern the male image in terms of authorized styles of speech, clothing, and dispositions which reinforce and sustain masculine reputations (Plummer, 2007).

As agents of socialisation, tertiary institutions serve as positions of strength for male students. Tertiary institutions are instrumental in reinforcing how males actively develop, negotiate and re-negotiate their masculinities (Swain, 2006). Tertiary institutions reinforce masculinity through their structure, pedagogy and curriculum, and keep male students from achieving positive educational outcomes (Connell, 1996). In the Caribbean context, males who show enthusiasm for learning have been labelled as 'girlish', contradicting what the traditional macho image should convey. In a study of students in Jamaica, Barbados, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines (Parry, 2004), teachers described English as a possible handicap to boys' learning and a contributing factor to their underachievement, as male students considered English as a subject "too effeminate", "not macho enough" and "too girlish" for males (Parry, 2004, p.176). In the Jamaica context for instance, the head of the Jamaican Teachers Association, has argued that Jamaican male students choose to perform poorly in an attempt not to undermine their masculinity. Cameron stated that young males deliberately underperformed so as not to be considered feminine among their peers, as their general

perception of masculinity suggested that if males aspired to perform highly it meant that they were feminine.

This brings into focus masculine identity and what that means to young males attempting to achieve academically within the Caribbean. In a multi-ethnographical study that examined boys' perception of identity, Clarke (2007) observed that boys' gender identity was significantly defined by the avoidance of feminine behaviours, and that, from a very early age, through cultural expectations, they "identified with the dominance of masculinity and the subordination of women" (16). Within the Caribbean context, male students identify with anti-school behaviour because they perceive that school is not for them and they do not want to be educated (Chevannes, 2002). In the same research, Chevannes contends that this may be a deliberate choice on the part of the male students, and the students' inability to perform due to lack of motivation. He further argued that if males were educated, the instances of negative behaviour would be much fewer. This attitude toward education may be compounded by the absence of role models in the home, and the school. There is also a growing ambivalence within the education system that allows for the misbehaviour of boys to continue, partly to curb the tendencies of traditional masculinity that would endanger that identity (Figueroa, 2002).

2.5. Peer Group Association

In tertiary educational institutions, some students form relationships with peers that promote academic engagement, and these relationships become more salient in student social settings and their performance in the learning environment, while others associate with peer groups that promote school disengagement. Based on the concept of social capital, students could either establish networks to acquire resources (Bourdieu, 1986) or establish networks to foster an academic identity among students (Coleman, 1990). Either way, both perspectives explain the impact of peers and peer groups on college students. Peer groups have the potential to mediate or moderate influence in students (Stanton-Salazar, 2004) as peer groups are in a position to either discourage or encourage academic success. Consequently, student

experiences and activities within the learning environment are influenced by student memberships to certain peer groupings which have an effect on male student participation and overall school performance.

The influences of peer endorsed masculinity, and the need for acceptance within the group, become a fundamental priority as young males mature and negotiate the school environment. The association with negative peer groups, in most cases, supersedes parental and school authority, and impacts negatively on their academic and social development. Bailey, Branch, McGarrity & Stuart (1998), cited in Edmound-Woods (2007), argue that “some of these groups become fundamental identity bearing groups who, not only impose their behaviour on the young men, but separate them competitively and conflictively from other similar groups of young men” (59). Since some peer groups are marginalised in the learning environment, they essentially promote oppositional school identity which encourages members to resist schooling practices (Gandara, O’Hara, and Gutierrez, 2004). Male virtues, for example strength and independence, once considered positive values, have become masculine vices in the form of aggression, macho bad boy image, gangster speech and detachment. These are images associated with the ideology of the peer groups, transferred into the schools through the attitude and behaviour of boys. What male students need most is positive role models who can help channel their energies into more positive outcomes (Coard, 2006).

Additionally, male students associate being masculine with power, dominance, and physical strength (Budde, 2005), which may also lie in the kind of role models they admire. More often than not, these male stereotyped role models espouse power, physical strength, and aggressiveness which the male students consider to be sufficient for the ultimate life survival skills (Eckert & Imhof, 2012). But within the learning institutions, the absence of male teachers as role models can impact negatively on male student educational performance and perpetuate a situation where males are unsure of their identity and lack clear patterns of gender role orientation, resulting in negative consequences in behaviour and achievement (Driessen, 2007). These studies show that male attitudes and behaviours are antithetical to academic achievement and are, therefore, associated with male academic underachievement.

As this research study shows, the educational environment no longer holds much value for young men in establishing their identities, as this environment becomes less attractive to them.

2.6. Socioeconomic Status

Prior studies on socioeconomic status (Caldas & Bankston, 2004), have shown that family socioeconomic status has an important effect on students' academic achievement, low socioeconomic status is believed to negatively affects student academic achievement as it prevents access to vital resources that students may need to engage in the learning environment and leads to high levels of stress within the home environment (Jaynes, 2002). In examining the various dimensions of socioeconomic status, parents face the greatest challenge in providing educational stability for their children. This presents the argument that parental involvement, and parental financial stability, impact student academic achievement (Desforges, 2003). The deficits in social capital prevent access to vital resources that students may need to engage in the learning environment, and lead to high levels of stress within the home environment (Jaynes, 2002). For example, Altschul's (2012) research shows that a "large population of persons living in poverty and families with low socioeconomic backgrounds are unable to provide adequate education for their children which adversely affects the chances of student academic success" (p.3). In Altschul's (2012) study that examined the link between socioeconomic status and academic achievement of Mexican American youth through parental involvement in education, it was found that parental involvement in education played a pivotal role in mediating effects of socioeconomic status components on youth achievement. In particular, low parental income was associated with less time spent assisting Mexican youth with homework. This was viewed as an indication of parental stress in response to economic hardships and lack of resources.

Altschul (2012) argues that "family stress processes operate simultaneously with parents' investment processes" (16) which are linked to students' behaviour in the learning environment. It could be argued that parental lack of economic capital as a result of inherent

socioeconomic status, increases stress within the home to the extent that it affects students' ability to participate and engage in the learning environment. Limited parental involvement within the home, a mediator of stress related to economic hardships (Altschul, 2012), institutes a sense of hopelessness among students, making them unable to develop the right habitus to help navigate the learning environment, thus perpetuating low academic achievement. Similarly, in a 2014 study that examined the impact of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic achievement, it was revealed that there was a strong association between parental occupation, income and education levels on student academic achievement (Kapinga, 2014). The study suggested that parents with high formal education had the ability to assist with their child's education and provide the resources necessary for academic success which improved their level of academic achievement, consistent with Altschul's (2012) findings. Additionally the study revealed that parents in informal occupations were less likely to assist with their child's education resulting in students' low level of achievement as their basic school requirements were not met. While the findings of this study suggested that economically deprived parents are less likely to afford the cost of education for their children and are less likely to provide a nurturing home environment conducive to students' engagement in the learning process, it is noted that parental involvement and support provides the human capital necessary for the academic success of the student.

Bowes et al., (2014) in examining the impact of parental socioeconomic status on students' academic achievement revealed that there was a strong association between parental occupation, income, and education levels on student academic achievement. The study showed that parents with high level of formal education had the ability to assist with their child's education. In addition, they are able to provide the resources necessary for academic success. This is consistent with Altschul's (2012) findings. In addition, the study showed that parents in informal occupations were less likely to assist with their child's education because of their inability to provide the child's basic school requirements. While the findings of this study suggested that economically deprived parents are less likely to afford the cost of education for their children, and are less likely to provide a nurturing home environment conducive to

students' engagement in the learning process, it is noted that parental involvement and support provide the human capital necessary for the academic success of the student.

Similarly in a study conducted by Considine and Zappala (2002), on the influence of social and economic disadvantage in academic performance of students, it was found that parents who had the cultural, social and economic capital were more likely to foster higher levels of achievement in their children and were also able to provide higher levels of emotional and psychological support that encourage the acquisition of skills necessary for academic success.

The study by Lingard et al., (2002) that investigated factors affecting the educational performance and outcome of students found that students from middle-class families who had parents working as professionals, or whose parents were in business occupations, performed well in school compared to those who did not have that type of network. This finding indicates that parents, who had high social positions, and sound occupation-based social networks, were able to develop the right habitus and were able to access their occupational networks to benefit their children. Alloway et al., (2002) found that teachers believed the lack of home support for male students, in the form of structure and discipline, was a major obstacle in forming a positive college habitus for male students. They found that parental lack of involvement, and the lack of parental perception of the value for education, influenced male students' commitment to learning

The interplay between social, cultural and economic constructs and academic resources has a significant impact on male students' engagement in tertiary levels of education. As literature has shown, a relationship exists between social economic status and student academic performance (Jeynes, 2002; Considine and Zappala, 2002), where the socioeconomic status of parents affects the academic performance of students. In the following section, economic capital is discussed, to elaborate further on how the absence of economic capital engenders students' underachievement in tertiary education.

In the analysis of “Capital” as a financial resource, Archer et al., (2007) argue that money and other economic forms of capital exacerbate inequalities in tertiary education, as the challenge facing most students is access to financial resources. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds lack the network to seek adequate compensating employment and, secondly, they do not have the time to engage in adequate employment due to schooling demands. They, therefore, do not have the economic capital to invest in their education. In other words, students lack the ability to purchase advantage as students do who are from higher socioeconomic backgrounds. Archer et al., (2007) contend that male students coming from a background of inadequate resources are placed at a disadvantage because they are unable to acquire the tools for upward mobility.

Their financial constraints are further exacerbated by their inability to access financial resources such as tuition bursaries, extra tutoring, school tuition and books. The argument is therefore presented that students should carefully consider their financial status when making a decision to enroll in tertiary education (Wray et al., 2014). The longitudinal study by Harrison *et al.*, (2007) on low-income, full-time students in the UK revealed that students holding bursaries as a form of economic capital had relatively higher levels of retention and academic achievement compared to students from similar backgrounds with no bursaries. However, Callender, Wilkinson and Hopkin (2009) criticized the study by Harrison et al., (2007) for not appreciating that universities were providing students with the adequate economic capital (bursaries). This is intriguing as to the extent which financial bursaries were meant to extinguish social capital inequalities perpetuated in tertiary institutions as highlighted by Bourdieu’s (1986) theory.

Conversely, the study by Bowes *et al.*, (2014) on access to finance and low income students in tertiary institutions yielded different findings compared to that of Harrison *et al.* (2007). The qualitative research findings of Bowes et al., (2014) showed that a large percentage of low income students on financial support felt that access to such support helped them to focus on their studies, hence, enhancing performance. However, within the same study, it was found that financial challenges faced by low income students were not necessarily the primary

cause for students' underachievement. This finding is contradictory to the extent that it routes social capital inequality extinction through financial support, yet at the same time, indicates that the financial support might not be sufficient for eliminating underachievement.

Students also experienced financial problems because of the lack of information and guidance in attaining financial assistance (Hurtado, Laird and Perorazio, 2003). According to the authors, due to parental socioeconomic status and background, students may not be equipped or have any knowledge of how or where to get financial assistance. The research showed that while institutions have the resources necessary to assist students to obtain such knowledge, the onus was on the students to seek and apply for financial support in order for them to persevere in their college education (Hurtado et al., 2003). In a related study on the impact of bursary schemes on students from low income backgrounds (Hatt et al., 2005) it was found that while bursary awards were available to all low income students, students were not applying for the bursary awards. The study was, however, unclear as to whether students were not accessing these awards due to lack of awareness, inertia or a general reluctance to apply for the awards.

Economic capital, in the form of scholarships or bursaries awarded to students, assists in student retention and participation in tertiary/higher education as seen in Reed and Hurd's (2014) study conducted to determine the effect of scholarships and access to financial support on students' achievement. According to the authors, students who received scholarships had a heightened sense of belonging and confidence in the academic processes, but they argued that the financial support schemes be considered as tools for encouraging enrolment rather than as tools for enhancing achievement. However, these findings were void of any discussion of the academic achievement component of male students, or whether the scholarships had any impact on student achievement. In essence, the study failed to show linkages between achievement and underachievement as a result of scholarship effect on students (OFFA, 2014). On the contrary, Callender and Jackson (2005) express the view that financial support affects students from different economic backgrounds differently, but they show that financial constraints affect low socioeconomic groups more than those of other groups in higher education. Students from low socioeconomic backgrounds were less inclined to incur long term

debts and more averse to debt, rather than appreciating the investment that scholarships would afford them in terms of academic mobility. In pursuing academic mobility, students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds were less inclined to incur debt, and tended to seek scholarships.

In the UK, a government funded research project examining dropout rates of students from higher education (Davies and Elias, 2003) revealed that financial problems related to college access contributed significantly to the decisions by students either to access higher education, or to drop out of higher education altogether. In this qualitative study, it was found that students who were on government funded programmes were more likely to drop out of higher education, compared to those who were on grant aid programmes. The study concluded that students who had ample knowledge about the overall cost of financing their education were more likely to continue in higher education. In as much as financial assistance enhanced students' participation in tertiary/higher education, the benefits of that assistance would be appreciated more if "better financial support", in terms of financial knowledge and financial access, were communicated to students to assist them in making better educational choices (Davies and Elias, 2003, p.3).

In the Caribbean context, lack of economic capital and financial constraints play a role in how students access and participate in higher education. For example, in a qualitative study on factors affecting participation and medical student performance in Grenada, Jacob (2002), identified financial constraints related to tuition fees as barriers to students' access and participation in higher education. Students who lacked adequate financial support for accommodation and tuition fees were faced with stress and anxiety that impacted negatively on academic performance, but once the financial position of students improved, for example through being awarded government scholarships, bursaries or significant reduction in tuition fees, student participation and performance increased (Jacob, 2002).

From the discussion above, it is evident that access to economic capital plays a significant role in students' ability to engage and participate in tertiary education. Having access to economic capital strengthens student commitment to academic achievement (Hatt et al.,

2005). Financial aid or the lack thereof, affects student ability to engage in tertiary education, and has a greater impact on students from lower income backgrounds (Pascarella and Terenzini, 2005).

2.7. Motivation and Self-Esteem

In this current study, motivation is crucial in understanding student behaviour and achievement. Students engage in different activities based on whether they are intrinsically or extrinsically motivated by that activity. The self-determination theory (SDT) describes behaviour as either intrinsically motivated, extrinsically motivated, or demotivated, and is used to, firstly, “Make the critical distinction between behaviours that are volitional and accompanied by the experience of freedom and autonomy...and those that are accompanied by the experience of pressure and control and are not representative of one self” (Ryan and Deci, 2000, p. 65). Secondly, it is used to understand student motivation and engagement in the learning process which affect the level of student academic achievement (Ryan and Deci, 2000).

The SDT places motivation on a continuum, positioning motivation from intrinsic motivation to extrinsic, and then to amotivation (no motivation). While the assumption of extrinsic motivation is that it is undesirable motivation and, hence, negative for student achievement, the SDT demonstrates that not all extrinsic motivation is undesirable. Extrinsic motivation regulates autonomous motivation (self-determined motivation) and controlled motivation (low self-determination) which, according to the SDT, suggests that the more autonomous or self-determined the motivation, the more successful the outcome (Deci & Ryan, 2000). However, in higher educational institutions, culture (academic content, rules, and coursework) can conflict with student expectations resulting in low self-determination and low academic achievement. Contrary to popular belief, not all extrinsic motivation is undesirable (Deci and Ryan, 2000). The authors posit that extrinsic motivation for students has its place and should not be used in isolation to advance the case for male students’ underachievement.

Lei (2010) offer an explanation on motivation that can be examined in the Caribbean context. Lei argue that motivation is a form of students' "persistence, curiosity and performance that enhances achievement". Students' personal identity or self-efficacy plays a significant role in establishing a student's fortitude, as the degree to which they believe in their own capability determines the acquisition of their academic goals. Bandura (1977) is of the view that persons with low self-efficacy usually avoid task completion. When related to student achievement, if students are not intrinsically motivated to engage in a task, their level of self-efficacy decreases resulting in poor student performance and underachievement. The difficulty of adopting this line of thinking for the Caribbean tertiary education system is that it would seem to suggest that male students have low self-efficacy compared to their female counterparts. Drawing from findings of this present research, it will be possible to confirm or refute Lei's (2010) study findings, and to argue the case for the Caribbean setting.

A number of empirical research studies have sought to examine academic achievement in tertiary education from the perspective of self-efficacy and its relationship to motivation, (Turner et al., 2009). In the research by Turner et al., (2009), which examined the impact of parental styles, motivation and self-efficacy on academic achievement of tertiary institution students, it was determined that there is a positive relationship between self-efficacy and increased student Grade Point Average(GPA). It reveals that a student who has a strong belief in self and self-achievement (self-efficacy) was more likely to achieve at most academic levels, thus raising their grade point average and the likelihood of continuing to succeed academically. The findings of the study can be linked to the SDT (Deci and Ryan, 1985), which posits that intrinsically motivated students consistently achieve academically.

However, Strelnieks' (2005) study that examined the relationship between the self-concepts and efficacy beliefs and the academic performance of minority students, found that student achievement is affected more by external factors, such as gender and socio-economic status, and that self-efficacy could only best explain the nature of female achievement and the achievement level of students of high socio economic status. Strelnieks' (2005) study showed that self-efficacy did indeed predict academic performance, but the study concluded that, when

examined by gender and social class, there was no relationship between self-efficacy and low socio-economic status. This suggests that there is no conclusive evidence to link self-efficacy to male academic achievement. However, strong evidence, depicted in studies by Turner et al. (2009), Ahmed and Bruinsma (2006), and Lei (2010), suggests that, to some extent, social capital, inherent within motivation and self-determination theory does influence male students' academic achievement at tertiary levels.

Apart from the lack of preparation by students, scholars have argued that some of the problems that underachievers face include low self-esteem or low self-perception (Valentine et al., 2004). The academic performance and outcomes of students can be explained by examining their perceptions of their ability through the experiences and interactions they have with their environments, which give an evaluation of how they see themselves as learners and how these experiences influence their academic achievement. Low self-perception was not found to be a factor that contributed significantly to student underachievement in higher education. The authors suggest, however, that underachievers are more prone to the problem of low academic self-perception than high achieving students primarily due to their low academic ability (Siegle and McCoach, 2003). Mroczek and Little (2006) posit that self-concepts are learned through the environment to which the individual is exposed. They contend that parents who fail to acknowledge their child's potential or abilities typically reinforce the child's development of negative self-concepts that ultimately influence academic outcomes.

A key issue for students with low cultural and social capital is how they are supported in the learning environment (Balduf, 2009). Transitions for male students into tertiary institutions are critical, and are likely to have an impact on the future achievements of the student (Haggis, 2006; Hultberg et al., 2008). In a Young, Glogowska and Lockyer (2007) study that examined staff and student experiences of attrition in higher education, the authors showed that, when a student's cultural capital is valued by the institution's staff, the student transitions more readily, adapts to the environment more easily and performs better academically (Haggis, 2006; Hultberg et al., 2008). However, the study by Bush and Bush (2010), on Community Colleges in the United States, found that a perceived lack of opportunities and services offered

by the college, and the negative attitudes that the males had towards those colleges influenced male achievement levels. Grebennikov and Skaines (2009) argued that male students were less aware of, and tended to value less highly, opportunities that are geared to help them develop further. The negative attitudes toward school work, goals and aspirations and the lack of interest in academic work also explains the nature of the increasing gender gap present in tertiary institutions. These negative attitudes convey subtle messages that male students are struggling with their education and are less motivated than female students to perform academically at the higher education level (Valentine et al., 2004). To put this into perspective, research on student motivation found that on average, female students who pursued tertiary and higher education spent more time attending classes and completing assignments compared to their male counterparts (Dayioglu and Turut-Asik, 2007)

Students are also motivated to participate in the learning environment if they feel comfortable and are able to fit into the culture of the learning environment (Bingham and O'Hara, 2007). As students access the tertiary institutions, they express optimism about their social and academic life, and enter the institution with a set of expectations as to what the learning environment can offer them (Nelson, 2002). Accessing tertiary/higher education represents a major development for students as they adjust to the academic challenges presented at the college level (Kreig, 2013). Students expect the institution to offer a variety of support services (Pike et al., 2006), and other experiences different from their prior educational settings. However, for some students, tertiary/higher education can be overwhelming and stressful as the collegiate experience fails to meet their expectations (Tinto, 1987). The inability to make a satisfactory transition into tertiary/higher education is associated with instances of early withdrawal from college and underachievement for some of these students (Lowe and Cook, 2003).

Students come to college with unrealistic expectations which, when not met, could cause stress and anxiety as these expectations are incongruent with initial expectations of the learning environment (Kreig, 2013), but when students' experiences and expectations of college are congruent, students' academic outcomes are positive (Miller et al., 2006). Studies suggest

that the difficulties of transitioning into tertiary/higher education are compounded by the lack of cultural capital from students' past learning experiences (Leese, 2010; Young, Glogowske and Lockyer, 2007). Cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1992) refers to the amount of resources available to the student either through association with family networks or commitment to education. Students who lack the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986) from family and their prior learning environment about the culture of tertiary education seem to experience an alien environment (Askham, 2008). For example, in a recent study that examined the early experiences of students' entry into further education, students expressed concern about being independent learners. Their prior learning experiences did not adequately prepare them for those challenges (Leese, 2010). Similarly, Bingham and O'Hara (2007) shows that students who are struggling to be autonomous learners lack the exposure from prior learning experiences. However, while Leese (2010) proposed that more structured activities were necessary to encourage students to 'fit in' to the culture of the learning environment, Bingham and O'Hara (2007) proposed that it was necessary for students to take responsibility for their own learning, which led to the argument that at this level of education students should not be 'spoon fed'.

However, both studies show that students who were unable to adjust in the learning environment may lack cultural capital from parents who have limited or no knowledge about tertiary/higher education, and are less supportive in matters related to the academic choices made by these students (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Another factor is the lack of prior teacher-student 'conversation' (Ridley, 2004), which can act as a means of support in response to the needs of the students. Archer (2007), therefore, suggests that students need to be supported by both teachers and the institution, as they access and participate in tertiary/higher education, especially since it is the institution's role to assist students academically and socially to achieve academic success (Leach and Zepka, 2004).

Prior learning experiences contribute to the development of learning strategies which are no longer relevant to independent learning as expected in higher education (Lowe and Cook, 2003). Consequently, students are ill-prepared to adjust to study, time management, and developing reading skills. For example, in a qualitative study using a sample of 83 freshmen

students to determine whether the lack of preparation and time management problems accounted for student underachievement, Balduf's (2009) study findings showed that most students were not sufficiently prepared for the rigours of tertiary education life, attributing this to their unchallenging high school experiences. Students were not prepared for the complex study schedules, at that level of education, and lacked the skills needed to succeed. In Balduf's (2009) analysis, not all students entering tertiary institutions were adequately prepared for the challenge within the new academic environment, and when faced with the rigours of the tertiary environment, they did not perform as expected (Haycock and Huang, 2001). A systematic and holistic educational policy and a confluent educational strategy are proposed to help students' study habits and increase student performance (Hurlburt et al., 1991). A confluent education strategy according to the authors would address areas of challenge among students, which are issues in the area of societal pressure, identity and self-worth.

Literature suggests that student study habits determine the academic performance of students (Hussain, 2006), however students deteriorating knowledge and low understanding of concepts according to Hurlburt et al., (1991) is embedded within the schools educational processes that the students are exposed to. In a study by Crede and Kuncel (2008) on study habits it was determined that effective studying required knowledge of appropriate study techniques, self-regulation, self-monitoring and the responsibility for individual learning as well as the value one placed on learning. Students lacking in these characteristics were also shown not to have efficient time management skills.

2.8. Teacher Practices

Some researchers have contended that teacher practices are influential on how students learn. This is because teachers largely shape school environment practices influencing how students see themselves and how they respond to the learning environment (Skiba, 2002). Supportive commitment of influential care givers and role models provides the cultural capital that enhances student academic achievement (Sullivan, 2002). For example, in a 2008 study

that examined student perceptions of factors associated with academic performance it was revealed that student success was greatly enhanced when teachers engaged students in interactive classrooms and showed concern for their wellbeing (Jordan, 2008). Interactive classroom practices relate to either teacher-to-student discourse or student-to-teacher discourse, which, when communicated on a continuous basis, influence how students react to and navigate through their academic learning. Classroom interactions, therefore, result in positive or negative achievement outcomes relative to teacher ability to motivate students through effective classroom techniques. However in a 2010 research on factors associated with low educational motivation among minority ethnic students in Vietnam evidence showed that when teachers paid less attention to students during normal classroom interaction, students felt abandoned, hardly participated in class activities and exhibited low levels of participation and underachievement. That study also revealed that because of the social distance between student and teachers, students felt neglected and abandoned in the learning environment which elevated their levels of low achievement (Tran, 2010).

Student achievement levels within the classroom are significantly enhanced through teacher interactions. This being the case, the teacher-student dynamics become central to understanding student academic performance (Lawrence, 2005). Teachers' perceptions of their students affect academic achievement (Leese, 2010), as teachers have the ability to shape, not only the learning experience, but also the academic progress of the student (Figueroa, 2000). However, in cases of students' failure, teachers generally disassociate themselves from any blame arguing that achievement, or lack thereof, should be the sole responsibility of the students (Lawrence, 2005). Early negative assessments and perceptions of students by teachers influence academic performance and cause student disengagement and negative academic outcomes (Thomas and Stevenson, 2009; Davis, 2003; Noguera, 2003).

Relatedly, when teachers express enthusiasm about their work, are engaged and knowledgeable about content and pedagogy, they influence student learning (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013). Martino and Kehler (2006) point out that when teachers use a relevant, engaging curriculum; this improves the quality of the student learning experience. However,

Leese's (2010) qualitative study on early experiences of students entering higher education, cautions that, while it is possible to elevate students' cultural capital to an equitable position to participate in higher education, teachers need to be aware of the subtle messages within the learning environment that make student learning difficult. Male students who feel they are supported by their teachers are more likely to perform and be successful in academics (Howard, 2002). Noguera (2003), however, is of the view that male students' success was greatly reduced "when they felt that teachers were not concerned about them or their academic performance" (p. 449). The concern for students can be shown by simply paying attention to them and recognising their achievements, consequently, if students believe that the teachers respect their views, work with their skills level and offer continuous encouragement, they are more likely to be successful in the classroom (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013).

Within the classroom, however, teachers may respond to students differently, depending on the gender of the students (Hoffman and Oreopoulos, 2006). Interactions within the classroom may also depend on the gender of the teachers. For example, in Dee's (2006) study, he theorises that student engagement in the classroom significantly increases when teachers are viewed as gender-specific role models. Dee informs us that "the potential existence of a role model effect implies that a student will have improved intellectual engagement, conduct, and academic performance when assigned a same-gender teacher" (p.8). The educational relevance of male role model to male student is that student engagement is greater with teachers of their own gender which positively impacts male student performance (Dee, 2006). Similarly, Skelton (2002) takes the position that male teachers would be able to provide more desired forms of masculinity that would counter male student negative classroom behaviours and help improve their educational outcomes. Francis & Skelton (2005) argue that male teachers behave and teach differently and advocate that male teaching habits are more appropriate and appealing to male students, suggesting that male teachers act as role models to male students, and through their behaviour help raise male academic achievement.

A study done by Martino and Kehler (2006) shows, however, that teacher gender is not seen as relevant to how male students achieve. The study concludes, though, that good pedagogy skills and an engaging curriculum are significant in improving the quality of student learning experiences. Previous studies show the absence of empirical evidence that male teachers teach differently and adopt different classroom pedagogies and practices when compared to female teachers (Skelton, 2002). Within the Caribbean, however, the issue of teacher gender and student performance at the collegiate level has not been assessed.

2.9. Summary

In this chapter, the review of Bourdieu's (1986) social and cultural capital theory is discussed as the basis for the theoretical framework for this study on male academic underachievement in tertiary education, and has also been used to explain the inequalities that are experienced within tertiary education. The chapter identifies factors contributing to male student underachievement within the tertiary learning environment, using Bourdieu's theoretical framework of habitus, and social and cultural capital as the basis for understanding the experiences that these students face as they conceptualise themselves as learners. In addition, it shows social class as being a major factor influencing underachievement at the tertiary level, confirming class and habitus as integral components to understanding male academic underachievement.

The social conditioning of class and habitus perpetuate the stereotype threat (Steele & Aronson, 1995) which impacts on student engagement and achievement. The lack of motivation, socioeconomic background, socialisation, teacher-student relationship, and student identity are all factors that challenge the level of male student performance. When these factors are negatively validated they lead to student underachievement. Students who are not motivated to achieve display little engagement and little mastery of content. Such behaviours put them at risk of producing negative academic outcomes. The evidence of studies of

underachievement in tertiary education suggests that students who display low motivation are usually unable to cope with the stress and academic challenges of college life.

Based on the literature, this study takes the view that underachievement at the tertiary level is perpetuated by the inequalities within social class, which results in different levels of educational outcome, and that material and cultural differences (Burke, 2012) that become embedded dispositions incline disadvantaged learners within tertiary education to disengage from the learning environment. This researcher sought literature that would expand the understanding of male underachievement with a bias to the Caribbean, particularly Saint Lucia. The study is significant because it examines male student underachievement in tertiary education and focuses on the behaviours and attitudes associated with underachievement. The literature has shown that underachievement of male students cannot be simply understood as a matter of cognitive ability but, more so, as attitudinal behaviours that challenge how students react within their environment to produce successful academic outcomes.

The next chapter provides details of the research design, which adopts the constructivist/interpretive approach (Lincoln & Guba, 2000) that aims at understanding experiences from the perspectives of those who participated in the experience and puts meaning to the behaviours that affect their overall achievement.

3.1. INTRODUCTION

As outlined in chapter 1, this research study focuses on exploring the underlying factors responsible for male students' academic underachievement, as well as on providing an in-depth account of students' perceptions on underachievement within the tertiary education institutions in St. Lucia. Chapter 2 examined the key themes emerging from the literature on academic underachievement. It also established the theoretical framework for the study. Understanding the complex nature of male academic underachievement from the perspectives of the male students themselves will help generate contextual and relevant data that will aid the understanding of male academic underachievement. The purpose of this chapter is to describe and justify the methodological approaches and research design used in this research to understand male academic underachievement at the tertiary level in St. Lucia.

This chapter begins by identifying the purpose of the research and the research questions used to guide the course of the research. This is followed first by a discussion of the underlying philosophical assumption of the research and the rationale for the use of Interpretivism as a research paradigm and the framework for the research. Second, a discussion of the research strategies and research methods used to access the data about male students' academic underachievement. Third, individual and focus group interviews are discussed as methods of data collection. Fourth, the data analysis criteria and activities used to bring the emerging realities to light are presented. Fifth, an examination of the trustworthiness and ethical considerations of the research are presented. Finally, a summary of the methodology used in this research is outlined.

The purpose of this research is to explore underachievement of male students at a tertiary level institution in St. Lucia, and investigate the contributory factors giving rise to underachievement, from the perspective of the male students themselves. The aim is to investigate how male students conceptualise and understand themselves as learners, identify

what works for them, and provide recommendations that can be considered as avenues to assist and support educationally underachieving students. The experiences and perspectives of participants are explored using the following research questions which guide the course of the research.

1. What are the factors that contribute to male academic underachievement at the tertiary level?
2. How do male students perceive their educational and social environments?
3. To what factors do male students attribute their underachievement?

In order to address these research questions, research was carried out using teachers and male students at a tertiary institution in St. Lucia. This research study is guided by the assumption that the researcher can adopt those research methods most effective at capturing participant perceptions and enhancing validity (Creswell, 2007). However, simply capturing knowledge from participants would not be beneficial to any research if the philosophical assumptions or methodological strategies do not align with the objectives and purpose of the research study (Creswell, 2007). In other words, the methodological practice should be appropriate for the research questions.

3.2. Research Paradigm

All research utilises a philosophical stance which rests upon ontological and epistemological strands that examine the nature of knowledge, and how the knowledge about what is known is gained (Creswell, 1998). In this research, the researcher's challenge was to identify an orientation that would assist in fulfilling the aims of the research, as expressed by the research questions above. Olsen, et al., (1992, p.16) define a research paradigm as "pattern, structure and framework, a system of scientific and academic ideas, values and assumptions" used to scrutinize problems and find solutions. Additionally, research paradigms represent the

individuals' worldview, defining the nature of the world in which they live, and give direction to the ontological and epistemological aspects of the research (Guba and Lincoln, 1994).

The ontological stance responds to questions about the 'nature of reality' (Guba and Lincoln, 1989, p. 83). The central premise of the ontological assumption for this present research is that the nature of reality is socially constructed; as such, there is an emphasis on understanding what the nature of reality is, and how meanings are interpreted (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). One of the aims of the study is to determine how male students perceive their educational and social environments. The students taking part in this research had the opportunity to construct their own thoughts, meanings and interpretations on how they perceived their educational and social environments. With this in mind, the researcher's ontological position was that each participant's knowledge, no matter how varied, is useful in answering the research questions that explore the experiences of male students within their learning and social environment.

Epistemology is a "way of understanding and explaining how we know what we know" (Crotty, 2003, p.3), or, as Guba & Lincoln (1998) emphasise, is the "nature of the relationship between the knower or would be knower and the known" (p.201). Epistemology encompasses criteria that determine the context of the truth, and makes inferences as to what kinds of knowledge are possible, and how the researcher can ensure that the knowledge is legitimate (Maynard, 1995). The best way to gather knowledge is by maintaining rigorous interpretations of the truth between the researcher and those being researched. This research, therefore, utilises a constructivist epistemological stance, that shows that students experience different socially constructed realities, and are able to create multiple realities in their minds that help them to explain the nature of underachievement as expressed in the objectives of this study. In this research, the construct of meaning is transmitted within a social context. The constructivist epistemological stance holds that individuals seek understanding of the world that they live in. The study thus addresses the process of interaction among individuals and focuses on understanding individuals' views of a phenomenon, internalising the meaning that individuals attach to those realities derived from their social consciousness (Lincoln & Guba, 2000).

My goal in this research is to understand the meanings young male students attach to the concept of underachievement, conceding that they have divergent views of academic underachievement, and that they develop subjective meanings for their experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2005). Hence, it became my role, as the researcher, to look for the complexities of views presented by the students and interpret meaning from the messages obtained through their everyday interactions with others within their immediate learning environment.

3.3. Theoretical Perspective – Interpretivism

Linked to my ontological position, the paradigm adopted for this research is centered within the interpretive paradigm (Lincoln and Guba, 2000) embedded in the constructivist approach, which situates Interpretivism as a “framework that stresses on the understanding of the social world” (Crotty, 1998, p. 64). Lincoln and Denzin (2000) argue that qualitative research involves an interpretive and naturalistic approach that examines elements in their natural environment and puts meanings to their experiences, unlike quantitative research which employs scientific methodology to explain and interpret realities. Interpretivist research centers on the epistemological position that requires a researcher to “grasp the subjective meanings of social action” (Bryman, 2008, p. 694), and relies heavily on the interpretation of human actions in an attempt to understand how individuals make sense of their environment.

The advantage of Interpretivism is that it examines meanings of social events and the experiences that people have, related to their environment, and holds the view that the knowledge acquired within the social environment is unique, personal and subjective. These elements confirm Prasad’s (2005) assertion that within the interpretive tradition, it is proposed that “human interaction is the starting point for developing knowledge about a social world” (Prasad, 2005, p.13). With this in mind, the research participants, in this study, become the central focus of the research and are instrumental in providing knowledge of their lived experiences, perceptions and personal feelings related to a particular reality. Consequently,

their subjective experiences help explain how and why they behave in certain ways in society (Burrell & Morgan, 1979).

The methodological debate of Interpretivism embodied in this research, emphasises the subjectivity of individual accounts of a particular situation (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). In this case, the nature of underachievement and the accounts of students' and teachers' experiences within the learning environment were generated as the researcher engaged in personal interactions with the participants. My focus in the research is to examine participants' thought patterns, behaviour, reactions and interactions within their environment, as the rich data embedded in their experiences, when extracted, are crucial to understanding the reasons for students' academic underachievement. The accounts of academic achievement, given by teachers and students, are therefore viewed as subjective, as the explanations provided by both students and teachers are varied in interpretation. Each participant produces an interpretation of his or her experiences that could be used to understand what affects and influences academic achievement within the learning environment.

Constructivists do not generally begin with a theory (as with post positivists) but rather they "generate or inductively develop a theory or pattern of meanings" throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). As a constructivist researcher, I wanted to understand male students' underachievement by exploring students' experiences from their own perspectives within the institutional context, using the interpretivist perspective. This would enable the collection of rich contextual data from participants, and add richness and depth to conclusions of the research study.

However, an alternative paradigm, Positivism, was investigated as a possible approach to understanding the realities of the students within their learning environment. Based on the ideas of philosopher August Comte, the positivist paradigm informs that knowledge about a phenomenon can be obtained within an environment by observation and experimentation that makes use of scientific methods to study human behaviour. The assumption of the positivist paradigm is that reality exists, "whether it is observed or not, irrespective of who observes it" (Bassey, 1998, p. 42) and holds the position that human behaviour can be predicted through

scientific methods of analysis based on the assumption that laws govern social events. Accordingly, this would allow the researcher to understand, describe, predict, and control the social event.

The aim of the positivist approach is to examine existing facts and establish the relationship between them (Hara, 1995). As such, the positivist epistemology positions scientific measures as a means of achieving the truth about a phenomenon which is essentially objectivist (Guba and Lincoln, 1994). In this case, the researcher remains detached and uninvolved from the reality under investigation, making the acquisition of knowledge beyond what is measured impossible to achieve. The positivist approach is not considered ideal for this present research because of its focus on scientific measurements to make decisions about the research and not on the interpretation of individual feelings and thought processes inherent in this research. It is also not appropriate for this research because it limits the interface between the researcher and those being researched, which contrasts with the theoretical perspective of Interpretivism as explained above.

3.4. Research Approaches

Adopting a research approach that would capture the essence of participants' interaction, respect the views of the participants being researched, and provide a clear, reliable and valid understanding of the perceptions of participants is important for this research. In order to identify the approach most efficient at capturing and recording the words of the participants and providing a detailed understanding of the complex experiences of the participants, both the qualitative and quantitative approaches were examined in this research. Each research approach embodies a different philosophical perspective, and utilising either of them depends on the philosophical assumptions that guide the research strategies and the methods used for conducting those strategies (Newman and Benz, 1998). The present study focuses on interpreting the deeper meanings that students attach to their experiences in the

learning environment, and based on the ontological and epistemological assumptions of this research, the qualitative approach was identified as the more suitable as explained below.

The qualitative approach has the “unrivalled” capacity to constitute compelling arguments about how things work in particular contexts, and can, therefore, be used to discover the deeper meanings that people attach to their experiences (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000). The qualitative approach to research typically examines the ‘how’ and ‘what’ research questions which allow the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of participants’ views and perspectives. This present study embodies the ‘what’ and ‘how’ research questions as follows: - (a). What are the factors that contribute to male academic underachievement at the tertiary level? (b) How do male students perceive their educational and social environments?, (c) To what factors do male students attribute their underachievement? These questions helped the researcher to obtain rich data about the lived experiences of participants in their learning environment.

The quantitative research approach, commonly associated with the positivist paradigm (Bryman, 2008), holds the ontological position that there is only one truth that exists independent of human perception (Creswell, 1994), and proposes that data is collected and converted into numerical forms to assist in statistical calculations to derive conclusions about a phenomenon. ‘Objective reality’ forms the basis of the quantitative research approach (Pring, 2000, p.47), which implies that while the truth about a phenomenon exists it can be uncovered objectively through scientific measurement that minimises researcher interaction within the social setting. In other words, the ontological position of the quantitative method is that objective reality exists independent of human perception (Creswell, 1984). Within the research, the researcher and the researched become independent of each other. Consequently, as the emphasis of quantitative approaches is on deductive analysis to examine the truth, its inability to lend itself to understanding and uncovering the deeper meanings of student behaviour and experiences makes this approach inappropriate for use in the present research. This is so as the current research aims at understanding students’ perceptions, values, and beliefs about the nature of academic underachievement within the learning environment.

The underlying assumptions of both the qualitative and quantitative approaches to research result in different methods of accessing data. The qualitative research approach is considered a suitable approach to aid the data collection process of this research since it aligns with the overall research aims. In particular, the qualitative phenomenological approach was adopted for this research as it takes into account the experiences of individuals, describes the meanings of those experiences, and seeks to understand those experiences (Hatch, 2002), as discussed in the section below. The data for this research was collected primarily from participants as they interacted in their natural environment allowing the researcher to develop a complex, holistic picture of the environment where “setting, interdependencies, complexities, idiosyncrasies and context” were taken into consideration by the researcher (Patton, 1990, p. 51).

The flexibility of the phenomenological qualitative research approach also makes it more suitable for this research on male underachievement, as it utilises semi-structured, open-ended questions (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000), making it easier for participants to respond in their own words, express themselves, and provide their opinions about their experiences in more detail. From a qualitative epistemological standpoint, the researcher and the researched are interactively linked, and data are derived within the context of the situation (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). In contrast, the quantitative method approach which, based on its statistical methodology, would not be positioned to extract such rich information that brings to focus participants’ feelings, and thought processes (Strauss and Corbin, 1998).

3.5. Phenomenology

Capturing the essence of participants’ lived experiences (Van Manen, 1990) and providing rich descriptions of their perspectives, describes what Phenomenology embodies. A qualitative phenomenological approach is identified as the research methodology that aligns favorably with the interests identified in this research, as it focuses on the experiences of everyday life. Phenomenology reveals participants’ ontologies, reflecting participants’ justifications of who they are, what they feel and why they behave in the way that they do (Van Manen, 1990).

Phenomenology attempts to understand the meaning and experiences that individuals have about a phenomenon (Creswell, 2007) and how individuals make sense of those experiences. As a research methodology it "thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness, and in its most comprehensive sense, refers to the totality of lived experiences that belong to a single person" (Giorgi, 1997, p.2). Phenomenology determines what individuals have in common and brings to light their lived experience, rendering it sensible and recognisable. As individuals interact within their immediate environment, their individual perspectives evolve over time (Purcell-Gates, 2004), which make those experiences unique. Moustakas (1994) points out that by listening to participants' experiences and analyzing the information provided through dialogue and discussion, meaning of individual experiences become vivid and the "essence or structure of the experience" is captured (p.13)

As a research methodology, phenomenology evolved from the works of Edmund Husserl (1859-1938) who advocated that the perceptions of individuals accurately represented their level of consciousness (Fouche, 1993) and suggested that the subjectivity of the immediate experience is the source of knowing (Koch, 1995). Husserl emphasises the importance of drawing attention towards meaning generated from experience (Guignon, 2006) and argues that the reality of the experience could only be understood in relation to the existing reality. In other words, Husserl views phenomenology as a description of the first person perspective, arguing that individual experiences (real or imaginary) are constructed through cognitive and perceptual activity below the levels of consciousness (Hammersley, 2012).

Embodied within phenomenology are four distinct phases that the researcher must embrace in an attempt to gain significant in-depth descriptions of a phenomenon. These are: epoche, phenomenology reduction, imaginative validation, and synthesis. During the epoche phase the researcher must take stock of his/her own beliefs and feelings about the phenomenon and removes any preconceived notions that he or she may have about the participants and their experiences (Moustakas, 1994), allowing for the bracketing or suspension of researcher beliefs. This ensures that the researcher remains open and non-judgmental to the way participants understand their own experiences, making it possible to view the experience from the

participants' point of view. Moustakas (1994) points out that the essence of the imaginative variation is its focus on all aspects connected with the experience including the essence and meaning of the experience. It is essentially the "articulation of a fundamental meaning without which a phenomenon could not present itself as it is" (Giorgi, 1997, p.242). Finally, the researcher synthesises meaning by incorporating all textural and descriptive information of participants' lived experiences in such a way that rich knowledge about the phenomenon is identified, and an interpretation of participants' lived experiences is produced.

Phenomenology necessitates using methods that can access varying experiences and individual perspectives, as well as providing a significant description of those experiences based on individual circumstances (Pollio et al., 1997). Consequently, this research utilises both individual and focus group interviews to provide rich in-depth descriptions of participant experiences.

Phenomenology was chosen for this research because the research embodies the subjective experiences of male students in tertiary education, and the meanings that these male students assign to the experience of academic underachievement in tertiary education. This research seeks knowledge concerning the reasons why male students underachieve academically in tertiary education, and seeks also to arrive at knowledge concerning male students' perspectives about their educational and social environment, as well as what they attribute their academic underachievement to.

3.6. Research Methods

Research methods, according to Crotty (1998), are the "techniques or procedures used to gather or analyze data related to some research questions or hypothesis" (p.3). Rodwell (1998) emphasises that the decisions for the use of potential research methods should take into consideration the type of inquiry, the relationship between the researcher and the researched, and the type of knowledge to be generated. Researchers agree that in order to study the context of a problem, or the subjective perspective of individuals, the use of qualitative research

methodology is most applicable (Marshall and Rossman, 2006). Qualitative methods bring to life the voices, lives and experiences of participants who interact with each other in the research environment, and are knowledgeable in the subject matter under research (Holloway, 1997). In order to generate rich contextual data that bring the voices and individual experiences of the male students to life, this research utilises individual and focus group interviews as methods of qualitative inquiry.

Both individual student and teacher interviews and focus group interviews were used in the context of this research, firstly, to gain in-depth information about the participants' lived experiences of academic underachievement and, secondly, to identify any comparisons or contradictions among individual experiences.

3.6.1. Interviews

The view held by Lincoln and Guba (1985) about research methods is that the interview is one of the most common and powerful ways through which researchers understand human behaviour in their natural surroundings. Mason (2002) emphasises that within qualitative research, three distinct types of interview methods can be considered: firstly, in-depth or intensive interviews; secondly, structured interviews; and finally, semi-structured interviews, all of which involve the "interactional exchange of dialogue", provide "thematic centered narrative" and present knowledge as "contextual and situated" (Mason, 2002, p. 62). They also have the distinct purpose of ensuring that the "relevant contexts are brought into focus so that situated knowledge can be produced" (Mason, 2002, p. 62). Utilising the interview as a qualitative method for this present research allows the researcher to "see the research topic from the perspective of the interviewee and to understand how and why they have come up to this particular perspective" (King, 2004 p. 11). Qualitative interviews, particularly semi-structured interviews, provide the researcher with the opportunity to focus primarily on gaining an insight and understanding of the nature of underachievement from participants themselves, as well as establishing rapport and trust with and among them. Semi-structured interviews are

used in order to explore and understand students' perceptions of academic underachievement and to help interpret the meanings of those perceptions, actions, experiences and participants' feelings.

The advantage of using the semi-structured interviews is that it aids the participatory interactional exchange of dialogue between the researcher and the participants, and allows the researcher to probe more deeply into the lives of the participants to learn about their everyday experiences. This advantage is consistent with Patton's (1980) assertion that the purpose of interviewing "is to find out what is in and on someone else's mind... and to find out from them those things we cannot observe" (Patton, 1980, p. 196). As the researcher, I am of the view that using semi-structured, open-ended interviews, encourages participants to identify and reflect on their true feelings as suggested by (Warren & Karner, 2005), revealing knowledge that communicates their perspectives. This type of in-depth knowledge is otherwise not effectively achieved using the alternative quantitative research method, whose purpose, unlike that of the qualitative methods, is to test hypothesis, identify statistical relationships, make predictions and study behaviour under controlled conditions (Lichtman, 2006).

The interaction between the researcher and the participants was real and conversational, which allowed for the development of trust between participants and the researcher, facilitating the process of collecting in-depth knowledge about male students' experiences. Therefore, based on the constructivist epistemological position of this research, the interviews are considered suitable and appropriate for the collection of qualitative data that is necessary to answer the research questions of this study. Individual and focus group interviews as methods of data collection are discussed further in the section below.

3.6.2 Focus Group Interviews

Different definitions of focus groups have emerged from existing literature (Lewis, 1995; Gibbs, 1997). However, a commonly accepted view of focus groups is that of a small composition of individuals with common characteristics whose interactions within that group provide information about a specific issue. Williams and Katz (2001) summarize focus groups as small gatherings of individuals with common interests, put together for the purpose of gaining information about a particular issue, and having the ability to “access the knowledge, ideas, story-telling, self-presentation and linguistic exchange within a given contextual context” (Barbour and Kitzinger, 1998, p. 5). Similarly, Lambart and Loiselle (2008) express that the primary goal of using focus groups is to “increase the depth of the inquiry and unveil aspects of the phenomenon assumed to be otherwise less accessible... group interactions accentuate members’ similarities and differences and give rich information about the range of perspectives and experiences” (Lambart and Loiselle, 2008, p. 229).

In the context of this research, the focus group is a suitable method to understand the participants’ lived experiences as they relate to their learning, their views and opinions and to extract their understanding of underachievement in their own words. The dynamics within the group help generate deeper and richer data compared to other methods of data collection, for example the individual interview (Thomas et al., 1995). In this research, focus group discussions elicit distinct data through questions that investigate students’ perceptions of the college environment, their perceptions of the student-learning experiences, perceptions on marginalisation, perceptions of teachers’ attitudes towards male students and students’ attitude towards education and career opportunities.

Using focus group interviews as a method of data collection facilitated interaction and discussion among participants and allowed for the generation of candid responses (Krueger, 1994). Focus groups provided a safe and confidential space through which the male students were able to collectively listen and communicate with each other and discuss freely the concept of underachievement and how it affected their social and academic lives. Further, focus groups

provided the avenue for expression of thought and allowed the participants to discuss issues that they experienced individually.

At the beginning of the focus group interview sessions, it was observed that some of the participants seemed intimidated and were apprehensive about making any contributions in the group (Madriz, 2005); this could be attributed to some members being more dominant than others in the group. In recognition of this, the researcher informed all the groups that each member contributions no matter how small were valuable for the discussion. After being reassured about the value of their contributions to the research, participants began to participate and engaged fully in the discussion.

Many of the participants knew each other either personally or as friends attending the same classes, and as such they were able to relate to each other and express similarities and differences in perspectives regarding underachievement and the learning environment. This was an advantage as the students were able to develop a level of trust with each other and encourage expression of thought (Krueger, 1994). Because of the level of familiarity, participants were able to develop a rapport with each other in the groups and this made it easier for the participants to discuss sensitive and personal issues such as finances, socioeconomic background and social class. As the focus group interviews progressed, participants realised that the majority of them came from a similar background, and they began to converse freely about the issues they experienced as members of a particular social class. Relatedly, because of the level of trust they developed as members within these groups, participants also felt comfortable discussing sensitive issues like finances and the impact that the lack of finances had on their academic outcomes.

3.7. Research Setting

The current research was conducted at a tertiary educational institution in St. Lucia, in the Anglophone Caribbean region. The institution is the largest co-educational, local, tertiary institution, with a student population (at the time of this research) of approximately 3,800 students inclusive of full-time, part-time, and continuing education students.

Students attending this institution are within the age range 17-22+ years and pursue instruction in the Certificate, Diploma, and Associate Degree programmes, in various divisions and departments: Agriculture (DAGRI), Arts, Science and General Studies (DASGS), Teacher Education and Educational Administration (DTEEA), Technical Education and Management Studies (DTEMS) and the Department of Health Sciences (DHS) AND Continuing Education (DOCE).

This research was specifically carried out at the Division of Technical Education and Management Studies (DTEMS) which has the largest student body, and also enrolls the largest intake of male students. Statistics show that enrolment at the institution for the academic year 2013-14 was 2,095 of which DTEMS accounted for 60% of the total enrolment (Education Statistical Digest, 2014). (The total enrolment above excludes continuing education students). DTEMS is further subdivided into five departments: Architectural Engineering, Business Studies, Hospitality Studies, Computer Engineering, and Mechanical Engineering. The students interviewed for this research were drawn from each of the five departments mentioned above.

3.8. Sampling and Recruitment process

Appropriate sampling methodology ties the researcher to the objectives of a study and helps the researcher glean and exploit issues that are important to the purpose of the study (Patton, 1990). In this study, two sampling techniques – purposive sampling and convenience sampling -were utilised. Purposive sampling is a method of sampling “where the researcher deliberately chooses who to include in a study based on their ability to provide necessary data”

(Parahoo, 1997, p. 232). The convenience sampling embraces the technique that selects research participants on the basis of accessibility (Marshall, 1996).

Using the purposive sampling technique identified by Parahoo (1997), the researcher was able to select male students for this research based on their knowledge and lived experiences of academic underachievement. Characteristic of the qualitative inquiry, purposive sampling focuses on “informational, not statistical considerations ... and its purpose is to maximize information” (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p. 202). As this characteristic is consistent with the purpose of this research, purposive sampling was considered applicable for the selection of students for this research with specific criteria being used to select students as discussed below.

3.8.1 Selection of Students

Based on Krueger’s (1994) proposal that participants within a given research possess homogeneous characteristics, the researcher used the pre-defined selection criteria that participants would only be male between the ages of 17-19, enrolled in the first and second year of the associate degree and certificate programmes at the institution, and were full time students who had a cumulative grade point average of 2.00 and below, out of the maximum achievable grade point average (GPA) of 4.00, over a period of one academic year. Students who had a recorded GPA of 2.00 and below were classified by the institution’s Student Records Section, as being on academic probation, as they had not been successful in completing one or more of the courses necessary for the required academic certification.

The approach used to recruit participants for this research was twofold: firstly, through verbal communication and, secondly, through the Students Records Section of the institution. Before commencing the research, the researcher took two consecutive days to visit different classes at the Faculty used for the research. The researcher informed the various classes about the research and requested that if persons were interested in participating in the research they were to sign up with the secretary at the Divisional office. For the classes that the researcher

was unable to visit, the researcher asked the lecturers who were teaching those classes to inform students about the research to be conducted. 96 students showed interest in participating in the research.

The researcher requested from the Student Records Section the names of those students who had obtained a grade point average (GPA) of 2.00 and below, as well as some names of students with GPA 3 and above (based on the recommendation of the Pilot Study, see section 3.9 below). The names provided by the Student Record Section were compared with the list of interested students, and a sample of 40 students meeting the selection criteria was identified. Those students who met the selection criteria were contacted via telephone and asked to attend a group meeting with the researcher on a specified date at the College library. Students who did not meet the selection criteria were informed via telephone as well. The students who came to the meeting were given further details about the research, including the nature of the research, importance of the research, need for confidentiality, researcher and participant expectations, recording of the discussions and withdrawal from the research. At the end of the meeting students were asked to take a few days to make a final decision about their participation. The researcher informed the students that if they were still interested they should collect consent forms from the researcher's office. They were also informed that only those who returned signed consent forms would be considered for the research.

From the initial 96 students who showed interest in the research, 40 students were selected for the sample based on the selection criteria. 36 students attended the focus group meeting, however only 32 students came to the office to collect consent forms. 2 students however did not return the consent forms and were removed from the sample, bringing the final number of students selected for the sample to 30 students. To facilitate the focus group sessions, 6 focus groups were formed with 5 participants in each. Students were randomly placed in the focus groups and each group consisted of a combination of both Year 1 and Year 2 students.

The following table identifies student demographics associated with this present research. As shown, male students were selected from various programs at the institution,

represented as D4. D5 represents the certification awarded on completion of the programme of study at the institution, and D1 represents student grade point average (GPA) obtained from the student records database.

Table 1: Student Demographics

Grade Point Average (GPA)- D1	Year of study - D2	Age – D3	Program of Study – D4	Qualification D5	Gender D6
1.11	2	19	Craft	Certificate	Male
1.14	2	17	Hospitality	AD	Male
1.17	1	19	Hospitality	AD	Male
1.17	1	19	Hospitality	AD	Male
1.24	1	17	Business	AD	Male
1.24	1	17	Business	AD	Male
1.40	2	18	Architectural Engineering	AD	Male
1.40	2	18	Architectural Engineering	AD	Male
1.40	1	17	Business	AD	Male
1.42	2	19	Hospitality	AD	Male
1.44	2	18	Quantity surveying	AD	Male
1.71	2	19	Craft	Certificate	Male
1.75	1	18	Craft	Certificate	Male
1.78	1	18	Business	AD	Male
1.82	2	18	Business	AD	Male
1.91	2	19	Building	AD	Male
1.91	2	19	Building	AD	Male
1.92	2	18	Building	Certificate	Male
1.98	2	17	Business	AD	Male
1.99	2	18	Quantity surveying	AD	Male
2.00	1	17	Business	AD	Male
2.00	2	19	Craft	Certificate	Male
2.00	2	18	Quantity surveying	AD	Male
2.00	1	17	Business	AD	Male
2.00	2	18	Hospitality	AD	Male
3.00	1	17	Architectural Engineering	AD	Male
3.12	1	17	Computer Engineering	AD	Male
3.22	1	17	Computer Engineering	AD	Male
3.33	2	18	Computer Engineering	AD	Male
3.33	2	18	Computer Engineering	AD	Male

AD- Associate Degree Level

3.8.2. Selection of Teachers

The teachers were also recruited through word of mouth. The researcher took the opportunity to inform faculty of the research during a staff meeting. There was a lot of interest shown by teachers. As such, interested faculty members were given consent forms during the staff meeting, and were asked to return them within two days if they were still interested. Ten faculty members, comprising both males and females, agreed to participate in the research and returned the consent forms to the researcher. They were then asked by the researcher to indicate what times they would be available to participate in a one-on-one interview.

Of the initial 10 faculty members who indicated their willingness to participate in the research, only 8 (5 females and 3 males) were able to attend and complete the interview process. These faculty members had more than 5 years of experience teaching the male students on a daily basis. The convenience sampling technique (Marshall, 1996) was applicable for the selection of faculty members for two reasons: first, that faculty could be accessed easily and conveniently as they worked at the same institution as the researcher; and second that the faculty members were present at the institution where the research was being conducted.

The staff members are of significant importance to this research because of their interaction with the male students. They teach the students on a regular basis, observe students' behaviour, and are in a position to provide candid information on the students' behaviour and attitude towards academic subjects, as well as identify perceived reasons and explanations for students' underachievement. Additionally, it was considered that teachers' interaction with students influences the level of students' motivation and engagement and could help explain reasons for the failure or success of male students within the tertiary learning environment.

Table 2: Teacher Demographics

YEARS TEACHING	GENDER	POSITION	CONTACT WITH STUDENTS
20	Male	Lecturer	YES
17	Female	Lecturer	YES
14	Female	Lecturer	YES
13	Male	Lecturer	YES
10	Male	Lecturer	YES
9	Female	Lecturer	YES
8	Male	Lecturer	YES
5	Male	Lecturer	YES

Table 2, above, shows the demographics of the teachers selected for this research. As indicated in the discussion above, all the teachers had contact with the male students on a regular basis and had been teaching at the institution for a minimum of 5 years.

3.9. The Pilot Study

Polit et al., (2001) view the pilot study as “a small scale version or trial run in the preparation of a major study” (p. 467), and can be used as a “pre-test to try out a research instrument” (Baker, 1994, pp. 182-3). As a research instrument, the pilot study can identify limitations in the conduct of a proposed study and can ensure that the research instruments are appropriate and relevant for the collection of research data. It can also be used to identify any anomalies that may prevent the true nature of the data from being reflected. For example, in a research study exploring African-Caribbean boys and underachievement (Graham, 2011), a pilot study was conducted to identify the initial views about the research problem and the

construction of the research questions. The results of the pilot study provided relevant and pertinent information that led to the alteration of some questions.

The pilot study was used as an instrument in this research to test the main qualitative instruments before beginning the main research, and to identify any anomalies in the instrument that would prevent the researcher from collecting appropriate data from the respondents. Data from the pilot study identified key themes that were used in the main research study. The pilot study was designed specifically to explore factors influencing male underachievement at the tertiary level, and to obtain a broader understanding of the nature of underachievement as experienced by male students within the tertiary institution. Its central focus was on assessing whether the identified qualitative instruments were appropriate for use in the data collection process, and to assess whether the questions used in both instruments were relevant to the current study.

According to Krueger (1994), participants in a focus group should share similar characteristics inclusive of gender, group, age range, and ethnic and social class background to achieve homogeneity. The participants of the pilot study represented a homogeneous group as they shared the characteristics required for the research. A purposive sample of 5 male students was selected from the general body of students at the institution to participate in the pilot study. The participants were selected based on the criteria that they were all male, belonged to the age range 17-19 years, and were enrolled in the first or second year of the Associate degree program at the Institution. Two students were enrolled in the first year, two students enrolled in the second year and one in the certificate program.

The pilot study was the initial stage of the data collection process and was conducted during a one-month period. Five participants were selected for the pilot study on the basis of their agreement to voluntarily take part in the research. Consent forms were given to the 5 participants before the start of the pilot phase. Students were informed that only individuals who returned signed consent forms would be considered for participation in the research. All five participants returned signed consent forms prior to the commencement of the pilot study. Participants were also informed that they were free to leave the interview sessions if they felt uncomfortable with

the nature of the questions or if they were generally uncomfortable about the issue being researched.

These 5 participants were interviewed in a focus group setting for approximately 30 minutes, using an interview schedule that comprised a series of semi-structured questions which reflected the focus of the main research questions. The narratives were audio-recorded with the consent of the participants and then transcribed after the interviews were completed in an attempt to identify key emerging themes. From the inception of the pilot study, it was evident that there were inconsistencies with the research instrument as students found some of the questions confusing. The results of the pilot study were then used to inform the direction of the main research process.

The pilot study identified inconsistencies in some of the questions that were asked during the interview session. The inconsistencies identified are discussed as follows:

Some questions were repeated, too lengthy, ambiguous and in some instances too vague. Some of the questions were direct questions which made it seem as though the researcher was expecting the participants to answer the questions in a certain way. This suggested that these questions were too restrictive and would not allow participants to talk freely about their experiences.

The focus of the research seemed to be only on the views of the male students. However, the pilot results suggested that while it was important to focus on the views and perspectives of male students, it was also necessary to include another population for example teachers in the study as they would be able to provide a different perspective on the underachievement debate and would also be able to provide additional data on students' attitude, behaviour and academic performance.

It was necessary to include students with higher grade point averages (GPA) as their inclusion in the research would provide a more analytical view of student perceptions about the nature of underachievement. The pilot study revealed that while the main focus was on 'underachieving students' or students who achieved a GPA of 2.0 and below, their views on underachievement would be biased. Including students with a higher GPA would provide a

different perspective of the nature of academic underachievement and how students experience underachievement.

Based on the nature of the research being conducted, interviews and focus group discussions as qualitative methods were appropriate for the data collection process because of their inherent ability to allow participants to identify and reflect on their true feelings (Warren and Karner, 2005) individually, and collectively as a group. Further the interview schedule was too lengthy, which meant that the researcher would not be able to complete the interviews in the allotted time.

After conducting the pilot study, it was necessary to adjust the format of some of the semi-structured questions to reflect the focus of the research questions and also to include questions that were unambiguous and easily understood by research participants. Consequently, the researcher made adjustments as follows:

The format of the semi-structured questions was adjusted to eliminating the confusion, while still maintaining the focus of the research questions. Questions were modified to reflect more open-ended type questions, which would give participants the opportunity to discuss questions freely without feeling restricted. Repeated questions were removed and the remaining questions were reviewed and reworded to ensure that the essence of the research was clearly stated and caused no confusion for participants. The research instrument was restructured and shortened, taking into consideration the amount of time participants would have during the interview sessions, but also ensuring that the focus of the research study was maintained.

The sampling criterion was adjusted to include male students with a GPA average of 3.00 and above so as to provide a different viewpoint and perspective on the nature of academic underachievement in tertiary education. In addition, a cross section of both male and female teachers who interacted with students on a daily basis was included. This was in order to provide variability in the responses, and also to generate data that could be used for comparison in relation to views and perspectives of academic underachievement.

3.9.1. Lessons Learned From the Pilot Study

Academic underachievement has many facets and therefore cannot be restricted to one dimensional viewpoint. It would not be in the best interest of any research seeking to investigate students' viewpoints and perspectives of academic underachievement to have a narrow focus in terms of interview questions. Participants needed to have the opportunity to voice their opinions without having to hold back their thoughts. Restructuring the questions made it easier for participants to understand and to contribute valuable data that would assist in answering the main research questions.

Including male students with a GPA of 3.00 and above was a good idea because the views presented by those students provided a starting point for a comparative discussion on the reasons for male academic underachievement in tertiary education.

The inclusion of teachers was key to this research as they could provide valuable insights into the nature of academic underachievement at the institution. The teachers' perspectives could also identify other areas of thought that were not garnered from the discussions with male students.

During the pilot study, the researcher asked pointed, intrusive and direct questions which proved not to be the most effective way of asking questions meant to solicit open responses. After the pilot study was complete, the researcher had to change questioning techniques. This was in an effort to make participants feel comfortable and willing to answer the questions. The change of questioning strategy made it easier for the students to understand the questions and their response time to the questions was shorter. This meant that there was less ambiguity and more clarity in the questioning.

3. 10. Main fieldwork and methods of data collection

The process of data collection for this research began with conducting focus group interviews with male students, followed by individual student and teacher interviews. Beginning the data collection phase with the focus group was strategic because the researcher believed that the focus group discussions would provide a large body of information that could be used as a background to the discussion during the individual student and teacher interviews. A week after the completion of the individual student interviews, individual teacher interviews were conducted.

3.10.1. Student Focus Groups

In the context of any research that utilises human interaction to achieve data suitable for a study, Bulger (2002) advocates the need for participants' consent to facilitate the data collection process. Consequently, before the commencement of the focus group sessions of this research, conducted over a three-month period from January to March, participants were provided with consent forms (Appendix A) that were used as a mechanism to ensure that participants were aware of, and understood the purpose of the research, the research process, and the benefits and risks of participating in a research project on male underachievement. Only individuals with signed consent forms would be considered for participation in the research. All consent forms were signed and returned by participants the week prior to the commencement of the focus group interview phase.

Before the commencement of the focus group interview sessions, participants were divided into 6 focus groups of 5 participants each. Each of the focus groups was assigned a code (G1- group 1; G2- group 2; etc.) to allow for easy analysis of the narratives provided from each group. The focus group sessions were scheduled on Wednesday mornings between 10:00 and 11:00 a.m. during the institution's designated 'universal hour' when students and faculty were engaged in non-academic institutional activities. The focus group sessions lasted approximately 45 minutes each and were conducted in a study room located at the institution's library. The

researcher considered this an appropriate venue for the interview sessions because of the location's level of privacy, as well as ease of accessibility for the students being interviewed.

One of the challenges experienced with conducting both the focus group interviews, and the individual interviews, was beginning the interviews on time. Some of the participants were engaged in various college activities that extended into the scheduled interview time, resulting in some interviews starting about fifteen minutes late. Though lateness on the part of participants was a common occurrence, all participants were able to attend their scheduled interview sessions.

At the beginning of the focus group discussions, the researcher introduced the participants to the research first, by informing them about the nature of the research and second, by enquiring about participants' interest in the research. Inquiring about participants' interest was important, firstly, because participants might have changed their minds about participating in the research; secondly, to ease any participant's anxieties about why he was engaging in the research; and finally, to provide a comfortable and conducive emotional setting for their participation. Participants were then informed that the interview sessions would be audio-recorded, and were given the option of leaving the interview session if they felt uncomfortable with the process

Participants in each of the six focus groups were interviewed using the interview schedule (Appendix D) that consisted of semi-structured questions reflecting students' opinions and beliefs about underachievement and their learning environment. These questions maintained the focus of the research questions and were used to inform the central area under research. During each of the six focus group interviews, narratives of the sessions were audio-recorded, and upon completion of the sessions, the narratives were transcribed immediately by the researcher in order to identify the key features arising from the interviews. These key features will be discussed later in the data analysis chapter of the research study.

3.10.2. Individual Student Interviews

On completion of the focus group interview phase, individual student interviews were conducted over a period of two months between April and May. They lasted approximately 35 minutes each. Five participants who had participated in the focus groups were purposely selected to participate in the individual interview sessions. All five participants were informed of their selection for the process, and were given individual participant consent forms (See appendix A) to complete before the commencement of the interviews. Even though they were given consent forms, the purpose of the research was also explained to them verbally, and a brief written description of the research was also presented to them. The researcher used semi-structured interview questions to elicit a more in-depth and personal reflection of the experiences of the respondents in order to answer the two research questions: (a) How do male students perceive their educational and social environments; and, (b) To what factors do male students themselves attribute their underachievement.

Participants were informed that each individual interview session would be audio-taped and they were also given the option of opting out of the interview if they felt uncomfortable in any way. Upon completion of the 5 individual interviews, narratives that were audio-taped were analysed manually, and then coded using the NVivo 10 software package.

3.10.3. Teacher Interviews

The rationale for conducting individual teacher interviews was to understand the nature of male academic underachievement from the teachers' point of view, and to ascertain whether or not present teaching strategies and educational policies were effective in supporting, motivating and encouraging educationally underachieving students. The researcher was of the view that interviewing teachers was necessary as teachers could provide credible evidence of students' achievement levels. In addition, they interacted directly with students within the classroom environment. Using the interpretivist approach, teachers' informal interviews were conducted

through semi-structured questions to understand the nature of students' underachievement from their perspectives.

Initially five male and five female teachers were identified as participants for the teacher interview sessions. The teachers were each given consent forms (See Appendix B) which informed them of the nature of the research and outlined that their involvement in the research was voluntary in nature. The teacher consent forms were mandatory for this research as it was a requirement stipulated by the institution's administration that teachers could only be participants in the research study once there was documented evidence that they had agreed to participate voluntarily in the research, and had voluntarily signed the consent forms. The teachers were also informed that their participation in the research process would not, in any way, compromise the teaching and learning process.

The teacher interviews were conducted by the researcher over a two-week period for 20 minutes each. Prior to the interviews, teachers were asked to complete a time schedule form which indicated their availability to engage in the research process. All ten tutors completed the time schedule form. However, only 8 (3 males and 5 females) were available for the pre-arranged interview sessions. The two other teachers who did not attend the interview sessions were, at the time of their interview appointments, unavailable to attend due to prior college engagements. In order to maintain teacher privacy and comfort, interviews were conducted at the researcher's staff office, which was a quiet, secure and private location. The researcher also informed all teachers that their interview sessions would be audio-recorded, and that they were free to disengage from the interview if they felt uncomfortable in any way. Data from these individual teachers' interview sessions were transcribed by the researcher on completion of the interview sessions. The transcribed data was then returned to the teachers for their comments. Only 4 teachers were able to comment on the transcripts as others were not available due to other commitments.

3.11. Data Analysis

There is no single way that data analysis can completely explain a phenomenon (Patton, 2000). However, “qualitative analysis transforms data into findings....No formulas exist for that transformation.... Direction can and will be offered, but the final destination remains unique for each enquirer, known only and if-arrived at” (Patton, 2000, p. 423). Data analysis is, therefore, viewed as a means through which meanings are derived from the data. The research questions identified in section 3.1, above, were used as the foundation for the data analysis and the Nvivo10 software package was used as the coding instrument to help identify themes from the data that informed the research questions.

3.11.1. Procedure of Data Analysis

The goal of this study was to uncover emerging themes, concepts and understandings from the data collected from both students and teachers about male academic underachievement. Once data had been collected, it was analysed using the thematic analysis approach to data analysis.

Thematic analysis is a process of “encoding qualitative information” (Boyatzis, 1998, p. 7), where the researcher develops codes, words or phrases that serve as labels for selected data. It is described as a “method for identifying, analysing and reporting patterns within data” (Braun and Clarke, 2006, p. 79). Its flexibility allows for rich, detailed and complex description of data. For this research study, thematic analysis was suitable for examining research questions 1 (What are the factors that contribute to male academic underachievement at the tertiary level?) which was related to student experiences and student views and perceptions, and research question 3 (To what factors do male students attribute their academic underachievement?). It was also suitable for examining the research question related to participants’ perceptions expressed in research question 2 (How do male students perceive their social and educational environment?)

3.11.2. Coding of Data

Analysing qualitative research involves examining a phenomenon, understanding it, and uncovering the bigger picture through the data that is collected to describe and explain the meaning of the phenomenon. This study's goal was to uncover emerging themes, concepts and understandings from the data collected from both students and teachers about underachievement. Themes are developed from the data obtained from participants' responses to research questions (Creswell, 2005).

The first step of the data analysis process, as used in this research, involved collecting the data using interviews from the sample of 30 male students and 8 teachers, and grouping participant responses based on the different questions related to the three research questions. The researcher then compared and sorted the participants' responses into areas of similarity and dissimilarity related to the research questions. In each grouping, participants' views were clustered together using the NVivo 10 qualitative software that links data through the use of specific words and statements appearing frequently in the data. Themes were then identified based on the frequency of the statements. Narratives from both focus groups and individual (students and teachers) interviews were classified into 8 major themes and 14 sub-themes which captured the essence of participants' experiences. The major themes were colour coded (red, yellow, blue, orange, pink, purple, green and brown), while sub- themes (themes that represented individual participant responses) which were cross-referenced with other participants' responses to identify similar statements) were coded using alphabetical notations.

The researcher utilised the colour coding process because of its visual representation, which made it easy to understand the data from the narratives. Creswell, (2005) suggests that the commonly shared information identified from participant narratives should be a reflection of and support the research literature. The researcher therefore re-examined the major themes and sub themes and compared them with the literature review of the study, identifying consistent themes that corroborated existing literature and other themes that represented new interpretations.

Major and sub themes identified through coding were further linked to the research question; that is, the researcher matched themes and sub-themes with each of the research questions to determine possible theories that would help explain underachievement as experienced by participants in the learning environment. The 8 major themes identified included student expectations of their learning environment, socioeconomic status, lack of financial support, lack of motivation, lack of institutional support, student-teacher relationships, study habits, and peer associations. These 8 themes captured the essence of participants' experiences, and will be discussed further in chapter 4 and 5 of this study.

3.12. Trustworthiness

In the analysis of any research study, the key focus is extended to whether the data and the data analysis are credible and believable, and in qualitative studies, assessing these criteria has been challenged by positivists whose concepts of "validity and reliability cannot be addressed in the same way as in naturalistic work" (Shenton, 2004, p. 63). However, while the criteria for evaluating credibility of findings in quantitative studies (Validity and Reliability) are remarkably straight forwarded and based on standardized scientific instruments, the evaluation criteria for qualitative studies focuses more on emerging data, that Lincoln (1995) posits is data that is still emerging, still being defined, and can therefore not be generated using scientific measures as utilised in quantitative studies to determine the credibility of the study.

As the framework of this research lies within the interpretivist paradigm, trustworthiness of findings as opposed to the positivists validity and reliability are the central thoughts of the researcher (Denzin and Lincoln, 1994). Lincoln and Guba (1986) proposed credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability of data and data analysis as necessary methodological measures to establish trustworthiness of qualitative research. These measures, as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1986), are seen to parallel the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and neutrality (Creswell, 1998) and are discussed below.

3.12.1. Credibility

In the designing, analysing and interpretation process of any qualitative study, it is important to consider the elements of reliability and validity (Patton, 2001). It becomes the function of the researcher to persuade the audience that the research findings are important and worthy of attention (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). Consequently, the researcher immersed herself into the research to produce credible knowledge about the participants being researched, becoming the instrument of the research (Patton, 2001), as the credibility of the research depends on how much effort the researcher puts into the research.

The researcher, considering the tenets for establishing trustworthiness in qualitative research, determined the credibility of the present research by, firstly, using multiple sources of data (Yin, 2009), triangulating individual student and tutor interviews with student focus group interviews to uncover emerging themes from the meanings that both students and tutors constructed about underachievement in the learning environment. The researcher used inductive analysis of data to produce what Yin refers to as the “converging line of inquiry” (Yin, 1994, p. 96), which, from the interpretivist perspective, emerges as participants construct their own realities.

Secondly, to aid in the credibility of the research, the researcher used member checking (Creswell, 2007) to ensure that data collected from participants were a true reflection of their experiences as presented by them. The researcher presented the transcribed data to individual participants to review over a period of 4 days to ensure that participants were actively involved in the review of their own interpretations, and to ensure that participants confirmed that the data represented their experiences. While Lincoln and Guba (1985) viewed member checking as most critical in determining credibility, the evaluation criteria in this research presented a challenge to the researcher in that not all the participants made themselves available to verify the accuracy of the transcribed content. This compelled the researcher to use the data as presented, as the data was audio-recorded and, therefore, was representative of accurate interpretations of participant experiences.

3.12.2. Transferability

In qualitative research, transferability or generalisation is achieved when the research findings can be applied or fit to other contexts or situations (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). To ensure transferability as proposed by Lincoln and Guba (1985), the researcher provided detailed descriptions of the participants and the learning environment, the research design, methodologies and perspectives used in the research, in order to provide rich descriptions about the nature of underachievement. These descriptions could then be used to provide the reader with sufficient information to determine whether the findings of the research could be applicable to other research studies. To ensure transferability, the researcher used detailed descriptions of the participants and the learning environment, the research design, study demographics, methodologies and perspectives (Lincoln and Guba, 1985) to ensure that sufficient information was available, and could be used to determine applicability of findings to other research studies.

3.12.3. Dependability

When research can be repeated using the same methodology at any given point in time to produce results similar to the original research study, dependability in that research is achieved (Lincoln and Guba, 1985), in other words, an audit trail is created as suggested by Patton (2002). The researcher ensured that detailed explanations of participant demographics, research procedures and methods used in the research to arrive at conclusions were adequately documented so that this information could be used to assist readers of the research to have a better understanding of the effectiveness of the research process. In utilising multiple data sources, which included individual student interviews, individual teacher interviews, focus group interviews and member checking, the researcher was able to ensure that findings of the research were the reflections, thoughts and experiences of participants and not the preference of the researcher (Lincoln and Guba, 1985). This was achieved by allowing participants to have an emic focus, telling it as it is on their own terms.

3.12.4. Conformability

Triangulation of data sources decreases the probability of researcher bias while increasing confidence about the findings of the research (Creswell, 2003). In identifying with Creswell's view of triangulation, the researcher was able to provide similar narratives of male underachievement in a clear and objective manner through the triangulation of the multiple data sources. In this research, individual student and teacher and focus group interviews were cross-referenced with member checks to ensure limited researcher bias, thus providing conformability to the research.

Table 3: Summary of Research Trustworthiness adopted by the researcher

Trustworthiness criteria	Techniques used in present research	Goal achieved
Credibility	Member checking	Uncovering emerging themes from the meanings that participants constructed about underachievement in the learning environment
Transferability	Detailed description of context	Research findings can be applied to or fit other contexts or situations
Dependability	Detailed explanation of research process	Research can be repeated using similar participants, procedures and methods to produce results similar to the research study
Conformability	Triangulation of data – using individual student interviews, individual teacher interviews and student focus group interviews	Comparison of data from different sources Use of different sources to ensure decreased researcher bias and to increase confidence in the research

3.13. Ethical Issues and Considerations

Bryman (2004) argues that ethical issues arise at various stages in qualitative research and should be addressed to enhance the credibility of the research findings. Where the purpose of the research focuses on describing people and their experiences in the natural environment, the research must show awareness of the ethical issues that may arise from the interactions between the researcher and participants (Orb et al., 2000). For instance, ethical issues such as informed consent, intrusion of privacy, usage of findings, must be addressed from the beginning of the study.

This study adopted the British Educational Research Association (BERA, 2011) ethical codes of practice. The code included requirements to get approval from the University of Leicester, and from the academic board of the institution under study, before any study was conducted. As such, ethical approval from the University of Leicester and permission to conduct the research at the tertiary education institution were gained prior to the pilot work. Permission was also sought and granted for teachers to participate in the study. The study also concealed confidential information, such as names, that could make participants identifiable. This was done by providing a pseudonym for each individual participant (for example ISI1) and each group interviewed (for example SGI1). The researcher informed participants that only information that they consented to, and reviewed through the member checking process, would be included in the final analysis. Additionally, the use of these pseudonyms was necessary to ensure that the data collected from participants remained anonymous, and to ensure that participants could not be identified in any way. No personal information related to the participants was noted in any form in the conduct of this research.

To participate in the research, signed consent forms from both students and teachers had to be returned before the interviews could begin. In this research, students were not considered minors; hence they did not need parental consent. Participants were informed of the nature of the research before any consent forms were distributed. This information was necessary as

concealing the intent of the research may endanger the reputation of the research and the mutual trust between the researcher and the participants (Bryman, 2004).

All data collected for this research was recorded. Before the commencement of both the individual and group interviews, permission to audio-recorded was sought from, and granted by the participants. The participants did not object to being audio-recorded. However, their only concern was the need to know what would be done to the recordings after completion of the research. Participants were informed that, on completion of the audio-recorded sessions, the recorded material would be stored in a secure, locked cabinet, in the Head of Departments office, to ensure that data was not tampered with, or altered, in any way. When data needed to be transcribed, the audio-recorded would be retrieved, information transcribed and new recordings would be made. To ensure that the identity of participants' remains concealed, the audio-recordings will be erased upon completion of the researcher's doctoral programme.

Adler and Adler (1994) are of the view that researchers who undertake qualitative research assume a variety of roles within their research setting, which may range from complete immersion with the group being researched (the insider) or assuming the role of a complete stranger (the outsider). Conducting the interviews in the institution where the researcher works as a lecturer raised concerns about the researcher's relationship with the participants, and what implications that relationship would have on the outcome of the research. To alleviate this ethical issue, the researcher provided verbal clarification to the participants (students) of her role and purpose in the research, as well as defining the roles and expectations of the researcher. The researcher also informed them of the necessity of providing truthful and honest information in spite of the prevailing relationship.

3.14. Role of the Researcher

Qualitative research attempts to understand the everyday lives and experiences of individuals in their natural environment, as such qualitative researchers use various methods to understand the social cultural context within which these individuals live (Myers, 2009). In the research on underachievement of male students in tertiary education, the researcher was the sole facilitator of the data collection and the analysis process; becoming the primary instrument of data collection. As the research was carried out at the institution in which the researcher is employed, the researcher assumed the role of an insider researcher (Breen, 2007); Inside researchers understand the culture of the environment being studied and have a close relationship with individuals within the context (Bonner and Tolhurst, 2002).

An advantage of being an inside researcher is the researcher's ability to study a phenomenon in greater depth, that is, researchers have intimate knowledge about the research context and can access information and participants more quickly. As an inside-researcher, familiarity with the research context allowed for ease of access to students' personal information, records, teachers' comments and institutional policies and practices. While this is an advantage for the researcher in conducting the research, it was important that as an inside researcher to be mindful of and constitute an explicit awareness of sensitive data, respect the anonymity of participants and the organisation at every stage of the research process (Smyth and Holian, 2008).

Bonner and Tolhurst (2002), assert that the insider researchers must refrain from altering the natural flow of social interactions, and establish a level of intimacy with participants in order to promote the extraction and interpretation of the truth. The researcher, having worked closely with teachers and underachieving male students at the institution for over twenty years, had intimate knowledge of student behaviour and attitudes toward learning. However, in internalizing student experiences the researcher refrained from influencing their interpretations of the truth by allowing them to express their feelings openly, and by not offering comments based on personal knowledge or feelings about the institutional setting or participants in general (Merriam, 2001). Making wrong assumptions as a result of preconceived knowledge could bias information (Hewitt-Taylor, 2002) and lead to wrong interpretations of findings.

Breen (2007) suggests that inside researchers typically choose to study and examine a group in which they belong. Being an instructor at the educational institution under study, the researcher was familiar with the academic performance of male students, the administration and the curriculum taught to male students, and was able to gain access to the participants and documents related to the research. Presented with this opportunity of access, the researcher had to maintain an ethical reflection and expression throughout the research process, so as not to influence the outcome of the research (Merriam, 2001).

In order to gain a deeper understanding of students' experiences and perspectives of underachievement in tertiary education, and to allow students to be the absolute source of their lived experience (Husserl, 1970) the researcher had to 'bracket' her feelings and preconceptions so as to capture the essence of the students experiences (Creswell, 2007). That is, the researcher had to detach personal interpretations and feelings from the research. 'Bracketing' was necessary in this context, especially prior to and during the interview process, as the researcher's extensive teaching and administrative background, if not reflected upon, could bias the researchers reaction towards the students' responses about what contributed to their level of academic underachievement.

The researcher's long tenure at the institution allowed for a degree of close interaction with students and faculty which facilitated smooth transition while conducting various stages of the research. However, as an insider research observer in this research, the researcher was confronted with role duality (Delyser, 2001), that is assuming the role of researcher and the role of instructor simultaneously. As an instructor, the researcher was considered to have power over the student participants in the research. The researcher acknowledged that this power relationship could influence participant responses, resulting in students changing behaviours based on the roles of the instructor.

To reduce this area of conflict between the researcher and student participants, the researcher impressed upon the participants that the two roles were independent of each other. The researcher assured the participants at the beginning of the research process that the two roles had different goals and that in responding to the research questions, participants were free to

express themselves openly and freely without fear that their responses would be taken out of context or misrepresented by the researcher. The researcher therefore provided student participants with a period of interactive communication (introductory question and answer session) to allow them to develop a level of trust and comfort with the researcher (Patton, 1990).

Because of the researcher's relationship with faculty members at the institution, the researcher did not have any difficulty articulating her role as researcher to faculty members. However, conscious that familiarity with the research context and staff members could alter participants' attitudes and behaviours, which could lead to limited information received, the researcher ensured that participants were informed of the importance of the research and the need to answer the questions truthfully despite the relationship that existed between the researcher and participants.

During the research process, the researcher developed an awareness of the possible ethical issues that could arise, that could potentially bias data collection and analysis (Smyth and Holian, 2008). For instance, as a female instructor and a researcher, there were questions as to whether the participants, especially the male students, would want to engage in the research process, develop trust with the researcher, or answer the research questions without holding back on their responses firstly because of the position of the researcher at the institution and secondly because of the gender of the researcher. To alleviate this fear, the researcher informed participants of the importance of their responses to both policy implementation and educational change and encouraged participants to think about their responses and look beyond the gender of the researcher.

Relatedly, during the interview process, the researcher recognized that the majority of the participants came from low socio-economic background and recognized from experience that that discussion of class is a sensitive issue. As such, the researcher was careful not to refer to social class or any aspect of socio-economic background, letting the data inform the conclusions. This was intentional on the part of the researcher, to avoid a complete shutdown of conversation between researcher and participants.

3.15. Summary

This chapter explains the research methodology adopted for the study as well as the research paradigm, research approach, research methods, data analysis criteria, trustworthiness and the ethical considerations related to the research. The purpose of this research is to explore underachievement of male students at the tertiary level of education, and to investigate the contributory factors giving rise to underachievement from the perspectives of the male students themselves. The phenomenological approach is utilised to capture the essence of academic underachievement of male students in tertiary education and to gain a deeper understanding of their point of view. Phenomenological research concerns itself with understanding social phenomena from the perspectives of the people involved and is concerned with the lived experiences of these people (Maypole and Davis, 2001). Individual interviews (both teacher and student), and student focus group interviews were used as the main data collection methods of the study to capture the lived experiences of male students in their social and educational environment.

Using the process of thematic analysis, 8 themes emerged from the discussions of male student experiences: student expectations of their learning environment, socioeconomic status, lack of financial support, lack of motivation, institutional support, student-teacher relationships, study habits, and peer associations, capture the essence of participants' experiences, and are identified as contributory factors to male academic underachievement.

To enhance the credibility and trustworthiness of the research, member checking, peer debriefing and triangulation were employed. As the research used human subjects as the basis of its analysis, ethical issues relating to using that population were taken into consideration and discussed by the researcher. In the following two chapters, the major themes emerging from the data are introduced, analysed and discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

THE NATURE OF YOUNG MEN'S ACADEMIC UNDERACHIEVEMENT

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Chapters four and five of this research are devoted to the descriptions, analysis and discussion of the data obtained from both teacher and student individual interviews and the focus group interviews with male students. The interviews provided the context for the study and also provided the information used to answer the following research questions:

1. How do male students perceive their educational environment?
2. What are the factors responsible for male academic underachievement at the tertiary education level?
3. What factors do male students themselves attribute their academic underachievement to?

The focus of chapter four is the nature of young men's academic underachievement and it examines the various themes that emerged from students and teachers responses associated with male students' academic underachievement. Chapter 5 will focus on student expectations of their learning environment and will also examine the emerging themes and sub-themes that provide an understanding of how male students see themselves as learners and conceptualize their learning environment.

This chapter will address the themes that emerge from the analysis of the data collected, organised as follows: Section 4.2: Theme 1 - Socioeconomic status and its implications for students' academic achievement. Section 4.3: Theme 2 - The influence of peer groups in supporting student participation and engagement in learning. Section 4.4: Theme 3 - Lack of financial support. Section 4.5: Theme 4 - Student motivation and self-determination towards the learning environment. Sections 4.6: Theme 5 - Student-teacher relationships. Section 4.7: Theme 6. – Study-habits and time management. The chapter concludes with a summary of the

key factors that facilitate male student academic underachievement at a tertiary education institution in St. Lucia. The major themes identified above are discussed in the following section.

4.2. Theme 1: Socioeconomic status

A major theme that emerges from the data analysis is the effect that socioeconomic status and background have on the academic achievement of male students. Specific sub-themes emerge from the data that highlight the relevance of parental education and parental economic backgrounds as important factors that influence the extent to which students achieve academically. In responding to the question: *“In your opinion, what are some of the challenges you face as tertiary education students?”* Participants expressed that their family background and, in particular, parental low education level make it difficult for them to appreciate their learning environment, as their immediate home environment is influenced by parents and family members who offer little or no positive emotional support to encourage their academic success as articulated below:

It is hard when you live in an environment that cannot support you in any way; hard to study when parents cannot support you and don't encourage you to do any better because they too are frustrated with their lives... The reality is that most of us are from poor backgrounds... we cannot afford a lot of things ... (SIY2)

All student participants expressed that they come from a low socio-economic background and this affects their performance at the college level. From their own observations and experiences of the economic situations of their friends and peers who also come from a low socio-economic background, they feel that most of them have difficulty concentrating in college, and exhibit negative attitudes towards their teachers and peers because they are frustrated with the life they are living. Participants are frustrated because

they feel that their economic situations will not afford them a better life, and fear that they will remain in the same position in life as their parents.

...I am not sure if I will be able to have a better life than I have now... it is difficult for my mother to even make ends meet... (SIY2).

However, 3 of the 5 higher achieving participants indicated that even though they too come from lower socioeconomic backgrounds they are determined to do well in college.

According to GP3 *...I want to complete my education... it is important to me... I do not want to be in the same position as my parents...I want to be able to have a better life (GP3).*

Another participant (GP1) further added *...even though I come from such a background I have to work hard to change the situation... if I want to get a good job ... I need to work hard... it is difficult but it is worth it... (GP1).*

It is evident from the responses that participants have different views about their social class. While participants all came from the same social class background, there are those who see their social class as a hindrance to their upward mobility '*most of us are from poor backgrounds... we cannot afford a lot of things*' and as a result they believe that they will end up in the same position as their parents. On the other hand, there are those who feel that even though they belong to the lower social class this motivates them to work much harder so as to remove themselves from the social class that they are in '*I do not want to be in the same position as my parents...I want to be able to have a better life.*

The evidence suggests that student participants are aware of their socioeconomic class and have internalized their position with that class. Some students view their low social class as a hindrance to their social mobility, and perceive that they will not be able to change their lives because this is how they have been brought up. This links to Bourdieu's assertions that individuals habitus develops in relation to the level of economic capital one has and that their dispositions and expectations when internalized become embedded practices (Bourdieu, 1997). As habitus for some students is structured by their past experiences, for others especially the higher achieving students, there is the concerted effort to work harder in order to achieve a

better life and change their economic situation. This also links to Bourdieu's assertions that individuals' habitus can be modified, creating different individual habitus even among individuals of the same social class (Bourdieu, 1997).

When participants were asked if the lack of parental support caused any major problems for them, the majority agree that the absence of parental support makes it difficult for them to develop appropriate learning skills as they are constantly exposed to negative views and opinions about college education *'It is hard when you live in an environment that cannot support you in any way; hard to study when parents cannot support you and don't encourage you to do any better.'* Which makes it difficult for them to develop a positive attitude about their learning. Participants indicated that their parents are unsupportive of their participation in higher education. This is because their parents have limited knowledge about that level of education and cannot really understand the benefits of such an education as indicated by one of the focus group participants;

...both my parents did not even finish primary school...they have very little knowledge of the benefits of college....so they not supportive of me going to college at all... (GP4).

Most of the participants are of the view that their socio-economic background limits their participation in learning and places them at a disadvantage economically. They expressed that as their parents identify with this economic disadvantage; their frustration grows, putting pressure on an already strained relationship between them and their parents- *'parents... are frustrated with their lives... The reality is that most of us are from poor backgrounds... we cannot afford a lot of things ... (SIY2)*

These findings show that participants' networks within the home do not work in their favour, and suggest that parental lack of involvement and not valuing education influences male students' commitment to learning, which aligns with Altschul's (2012) and Jaynes (2002) research findings which reveal that parental lack of economic capital, inherent of low socioeconomic status increased stress within the home affecting students' ability to participate and engage in the learning environment.

According to two of the participants, their parents are frustrated with them for not leaving college completely to engage in full-time employment to help supplement income in the home. They indicated that their parents preferred to support them in trying to get gainful employment rather than supporting their academic pursuits, as explained by one of the participants below:

...my father, in particular, who I see once in a while, just wants me to work like him... my father believes that I have studied enough and it is time for me to find permanent work to help him pay the bills. Every time my father says that I need to go and work, it makes me feel that college is just a waste of time. (SIG2)

The findings also reveal that parents' negative perceptions about learning at the level of tertiary education influence the participants' view that education is not important and, therefore, not much effort or interest should be expended in their learning at that level:

...My mother feels that I should not be wasting time going to school... I should be working... I don't have any support at home and I feel like... really school is not important... and don't take my work seriously... That's why I eh doing well at school... if I can find work I will leave college and go work instead. (SIY2)

These findings identify a link between parental educational levels and students' attitudes towards school and also show how students from low socioeconomic backgrounds, whose parents had limited formal education, are more likely to abandon tertiary education if suitable employment opportunities emerge. These findings indirectly link to Bowes et al, (2014) research which showed that parents in informal occupations were less likely to assist in their child education due to lack of economic capital.

All participants verbalised that their perceptions of underachievement are derived from the negative influences that surround them on a daily basis; they opined that the negative influences are manifested through behaviour of family and friends who believe that participants are incapable of learning at the higher level of education and, therefore, do not foresee participants' academic success at that level, as expressed below;

...Sometimes it is your own family members that do not give you the encouragement to want to continue with school. They believe that college is a waste of time and as young men it is not of any significant importance... my father... he always asking why I wasting time going to college... I finish study already ... college is a waste of time. (SIG3)

All the participants were of the view that the lack of parental support communicates the message that education is not relevant, which in turn shapes participants' negative attitudes toward college and academic performance.

The lack of support and attention from parents is also a source of concern for teachers who affirmed that students' academic output is greatly affected when parents showed a lack of interest in their children's learning.

Some parents do not understand why their male children should even be in college; most of them did not attend secondary school and do not know what their children are learning in school... they do not have the time to invest in their children's education. (ITI8)

Most of the parents are single parents with low incomes and have to work all the time; there is no emotional connection with the children especially the male child... as some parents have different expectations of male students and have no time to engage with them on an educational or personal level... so the students are left to fend for themselves... if no one is paying any attention to their work at home the teachers have to do it. However, it is not enough as parents need to get involved and encourage these young men... give them support... when emotional support is lacking in the home, students just don't care and their academics take a serious blow. (ITI2)

Findings from the teacher interviews revealed that parents are unaware of students' potential and have low expectations of these young men, which impacts on how they negotiate and approach their learning. According to 1 of the teachers, parents low expectations of male students impacts students ability to achieve academically.

...when parents do not have high expectations of their children especially the males, it makes the male students internalize that they are not worth anything and this impacts on how they approach their work at college... such students do not put any effort in their work and usually underachieve throughout their college life... (IT17).

However, some teachers attribute parental lack of support to the perception that students are now adults and need to take responsibility for themselves and their learning.

... at this level of education many parents do not get involved with their children's education as parents view them as young adults who should take responsibility for their education ... (IT14)

Another teacher added:

...very few parents know what these young people are doing at college... they don't ask them any questions and in most cases are too busy working to have time to spend with their children... most of the parents do not have that level of education that sufficiently gives them knowledge about what college education is all about, so they are unable to have any academic discussions with their college-going children. (IT11)

From the above discussion with the teachers, it was revealed that parental involvement was not really necessary at this level of tertiary education. It was perceived that as students' entered college, they were considered mature enough to take responsibility for themselves without the involvement of their parents. The finding from the teachers in essence contradicts students' reasons for wanting to have some form of parental involvement in their education. While literature shows that parental involvement in youth education plays a pivotal role in mediating student success (Altschul, 2011). This finding presented a different perspective on the need for parental involvement in young men's education.

The experiences of both teachers and participants in the present research reveal the impact that the lack of parental cultural capital has on student achievement. The findings suggest that the ignorance of the right cultural capital by parents and family members of the lower social class inhibit male student participation in education, leading to lower levels of

academic success (Dillon, 2010). The findings also suggest that as parents do not understand the importance of a college education, and are not familiar with tertiary level education, they cannot offer encouragement or give academic support to students, thereby impacting negatively on students' academic outcomes. This finding supports Choy's (2002) conclusions that parents with low socioeconomic backgrounds are less likely to understand the importance of higher education, and are less likely to value that level of education, which results in students either leaving college or performing poorly academically.

This also reveals that parents with limited educational backgrounds influence their children negatively causing anxiety, disengagement, or physical removal of self from the learning environment, resulting in their inability to cope with the mounting college academic activities. This is highlighted by a participant who commented:

My father is not very happy with me coming to college... he feels that I am wasting my time... I cannot concentrate at college because of this and sometimes I really want to quit ... there is so much work and I am just not able to handle it... (SIG3)

In support of this, another participant indicated:

It is very difficult for me to focus on my college work because I have to work and help feed my siblings. The pay that I get is really nothing to shout about but it pays the bills. I don't get much help from my parents as they work occasionally and don't get much pay anyway... I am not able to keep up with my studies and am failing most of my courses as I have to work... It is frustrating... sometimes I just want to quit college completely and just go to work. (SIG5)

The majority of participants indicated that the economic and social pressures that they experience on a daily basis compel them to consider exiting the learning environment to join the workforce to help sustain their family. These findings support those of Kapinga (2014) which identify a close relationship between socioeconomic status and student achievement, concluding that parents with low economic status are less involved in their children's learning and provide little or no academic support to them.

What emerges in this current research is that parents' inability to invest time and effort to encourage academic achievement stems from their stress as a result of economic hardships. Consequently, success is limited for students who have no emotional connection with their parents and have a negative home-based learning environment. Similarly, Mroczek and Little (2006) find in their research that parents who fail to acknowledge their child's potential, or abilities, typically reinforce the development of negative self-concepts in students, which have an influence on their academic outcomes.

All the focus group participants indicated that they feel deprived of parental attention and involvement which, according to them, leads to disengagement with learning and a lack of responsibility for their own learning, as articulated by one of the group participants below:

When I go home and nobody says anything to me, nobody asks me how I am doing at college or even wants to know what I am learning... That makes me feel that nobody cares what I do at college. I know my parents did not want me to go to college... I don't want to do anything at college because no one will praise me for what I have done.
(IISI3)

Student participant IISI3's response shows that he, like his classmates, is disappointed that no one is interested in what he is learning or doing in college. While he is aware that going to college and pursuing an education is negatively received within the family, he secretly wishes that someone would acknowledge him and what he is doing. But because of this lack of encouragement IISI3 does not feel it is necessary to perform well as no one will recognize what he is doing.

The findings support Bourdieu's concept of habitus and capital and shows that parents' low habitus results in students' low cultural capital. The findings show that participants' parents are likely to have little involvement in participants' education due to their lack of knowledge about the benefits of learning at that level of education. As such, parents' level of involvement is an indication of how much cultural capital the parents have. This further suggest that participants' low socioeconomic backgrounds reflect the level of cultural capital that they possess, supporting Bourdieu's assertions that the non-dominant group (in this case

participants from low socioeconomic backgrounds) have less cultural capital (Lee and Bowen, 2006), to assist with upward mobility.

The research also reveal that parents are not interested in ensuring educational advantage for these young men, which results in academic disengagement and failure, as seen in the comment below by a student participant:

...my father is not very supportive of me going to college... even when I ask him to help me with certain things important for my college work... so when there is really no kind of support it makes me feel that I should really not even be in college... (SII5)

The majority of the student participants are demotivated by the lack of parental involvement in their academic lives, resulting in low self-efficacy, lack of commitment to learning and low academic outcomes. Student participants feel that as their parents do not show any interest in their academic lives, it affects how they feel about themselves. Not getting any support from parents creates a sense of uncertainty in their lives and makes them feel that school is a waste of time. These findings link to the work of Strelnieks (2005) whose study finds that student level of achievement is affected by their socio-economic status. In the current study, lack of involvement, especially from the father, make students have less confidence in self, causing the lack of commitment to their learning. Strelnieks' (2005) study shows that self-efficacy does indeed predict academic performance, but finds no relationship between self-efficacy and low socio-economic status. In contrast, the findings in this research do show a relationship between low self-efficacy and low socioeconomic status, as students' self-efficacy affects their academic achievement.

When teachers were asked whether parental involvement has any impact on student performance at this level of education, every teacher indicated that the attainment of success is much higher for male students who have some form of involvement from parents or guardians in their lives, who show interest in what the students are doing and learning. All teachers were of the opinion that a strong family bond, either from a single parent or from a nuclear family, increases student level of performance and achievement as expressed by one of the teachers below:

...from my experience, students who achieve come from family units that pay attention to what their children are learning in college... these parents provide positive guidance and recognize the benefits of education and upward mobility for their children... they work with their children and encourage them... (Teacher 6 ITI6)

Teachers opined that it does not matter what type of family unit a student comes from as long as there is positive parental involvement and encouragement which is key to helping male students perform at every level. Interestingly, all teachers expressed that parental involvement and guidance, particularly from mothers, is a strong motivating factor for male student achievement and success as the teacher below stated:

...majority of the students come from single parent household headed by the mother... their role model... the mother in most cases provides the motivation and encourages them to work hard... (Teacher ITI8)

Interestingly, however, both teachers and student participants were of the opinion that some students from high socio-economic backgrounds are not always predisposed to higher academic achievement despite their access to social, cultural and economic capital (Gonzalez, 2010) as illustrated by a teacher's views below:

...I am increasingly finding that well-off students... students who have everything... money...family support are not doing well at all... the parents are not following up on what they are doing... most parents believe that once at college they do not have to pressure the students... they are adults anyway. (ITI4)

Further, a student participant stated:

...My friends also failing; they come from families that can afford; they don't have to do extra work like us... but I can tell you they not studying at all... they just wasting time... and their parents, because they busy working, don't have time for them... (S1G4)

From the teacher's perspective, it is not only students from lower socioeconomic backgrounds that experience academic underachievement, but also some students from higher

socioeconomic backgrounds *'well-off students... students who have everything... money...family support are not doing well at all'*. According to this teacher, even though these students have the economic and cultural capital available to them, the lack of parental involvement and emotional support influences how these students perform academically.

The student participant (S1G4 above) expressed the feeling that teachers only see students like him as failures, but in reality other students who seem to be well off are also failing even though they have everything that facilitates their learning. While he viewed these students failure as a result of their lackadaisical attitude towards their academics, he also felt that the absence of parental involvement in these students' academic lives contributes to their failure as well.

These findings contradict both Bourdieu's argument on the possession of social and cultural capital and Considine and Zappala (2002) who argue that parents with social, cultural and economic capital foster higher levels of achievement in their children. The findings in my research show that possessing cultural capital does not necessarily translate to rewards accrued within the education system as espoused by Bourdieu (1986). They reveal that academic underachievement is not only experienced by students from low socioeconomic backgrounds whose lack of access to social, cultural and economic capital denies them the opportunity for upward mobility, but is also experienced by students who are privileged by virtue of their social and cultural capital. This finding suggests that parents pay less attention to these young men because their attention is focused more on the accumulation of additional economic capital so as to ensure they remain within the dominant social class.

Drawing on Bourdieu's theory of social and cultural capital, which argues that individuals from low socioeconomic backgrounds possess limited social capital as a result of their class and habitus (1986), it is inferred that the relationship between family and the individual serves as a source of information that can be used to provide or limit the resources necessary for academic achievement. The present research aligns with this theory as participants' conversations illustrate that the limited interactions with parents (limited social capital), and the negative language used about the benefits of education, institute a sense of

hopelessness among participants which renders them unable to develop the right habitus to navigate their college environment thus influencing their academic performance negatively.

4.3. Theme 2: Peer Associations

Another theme emerging from this research is students' associations with peer groups within the learning environment. From the analysis of the data in this research, it is found that underachieving male students value their friendships with their peers in the clubs that they are a part of, as students in those clubs are able to give them positive advice and encourage them to stay and complete their education even though it seems difficult. These clubs, according to some of the participants, include students who are faced with similar academic issues as the participants. One of the student participants expressed the following:

...I am happy when I am in the club because I can be myself and talk to people just like me who have the same problems like I have both at home and at college... (S111)

Peer groups have the potential to mediate or moderate influence in students (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). While peer groups have normally been associated with negative behaviour that separates members competitively and conflictingly (Bailey et al., 1998, cited in Edmond-Woods, 2007), they are also associated with positive behaviour where members benefit from positive social networks that encourage positive academic achievement as reported by a student below:

...for me, I enjoy associating with my friends; we are very close and they make school interesting because we help out each other when we find it difficult to cope at school... ours is a Christian group so we spend most of our time doing positive things that help build our self-esteem... the group checks out for me and encourages me to try my best to complete my courses... it is hard but they always give encouragement. (S114)

The participant S114 above articulates similar views to the previous participant in that the clubs are units where they feel comfortable and engaged in positive behaviour that helps

build their self-esteem. Another student participant articulated that in the absence of any form of encouragement from either teachers or the home environment, the clubs are a good place to go in order to feel accepted as members do not judge but encourage them.

To this end, students' success at the tertiary education level shows that peer group connection plays an important role in male academic success and also enhances the quality of their learning experiences in college (Harper, 2006). As shown by Hultberg et al. (2008), appropriate and stimulating induction that includes opportunities for students to develop social cohesion and academic social skills that enhances male students' academic performance. Male student participants, in this research, reported being able to develop positive relationships with their peers who use their social and cultural capital to assist them in the achievement of their goals. Peer group members offer positive support that helps male students realise their potential.

All participants in every focus group articulated that peer groups provide guidance, structure and a sense of belonging, as the majority of the students who are members of those clubs have experienced alienation within the college and home environment at some point as expressed by one participant: (S117)

...I do not get any attention at home, and teachers they don't know what is happening to us, my friends and I like we bond together because we experience the same problems at home and at school so we stick together and try to motivate each other... I am not so good at public speaking but the club it helps me develop that skill... I am good in this group. (S117)

Another student expressed:

I joined the Young Leaders group because they give good study support... their vibes are positive, they motivate me and help me work on myself and my grades and I see now that their support is helping me improve my grades... like two semesters ago my GPA was 1.20. Last semester I was at 1.75... I like that. It makes me feel good about myself... positive vibes, I believe if I stay with this group I will pass all my courses. (S116)

It is evident, from both participants' responses above, that the home environment does not provide the emotional support needed for students to actively engage in the learning environment. It is the peer-based clubs that participants join, that provide the support and a level of accomplishment that helps develop self-confidence. It is evident that these peer groups provide validation of the students' efforts thus motivating their engagement in learning.

While participant S116 perceived himself to be an underachiever, who would not ordinarily fit in with the more popular achieving crowd, his feelings of belonging – '*I am good*' – and recognition are heightened through association with the group. The research highlights the pivotal role that peer groups have on achieving a sense of inclusion for underachieving male students. Despite the negative behaviours that are usually associated with peer groups, peer groups do provide a positive outlook for underachieving students in this research, and give them a sense of belonging and confidence. In essence, these peer groups provide the cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) that underachieving male students lack in the home environment.

This finding contradicts research by Gandara et al., (2004) who concludes that peer groups among the marginalised usually promote oppositional school identities and encourage resistant school practices. Participants in this present research, who can be viewed as marginalised, join peer groups that actually encourage positive school identity and encourage positive attitudes and behaviours amongst their members. Interestingly, these peer groups appear not to be the normal peer groups found at existing institutions. These groups are formed by students who are underachieving and need a place to be able to express themselves in a positive way. Within this group of underachievers, there is support and the desire to improve their educational outcomes. These groups are also instrumental in providing the social capital (Bourdieu, 1986), that students lack in the home environment.

4.4. Theme 3: Lack of Financial Support

When interviewing participants in both the focus group, and individually, about some of the challenges they face as students pursuing tertiary education, the lack of financial support emerges as a recurring theme which, according to participants, affects how they navigate the learning environment. Student participants expressed that their academic performance is affected by the lack of financial support indicative of their socioeconomic status. The findings in this research show that all student participants coming from low-income households have significant financial difficulties as expressed below:

... I don't have food to eat before I come to college... my mother's income is very small... and cannot even help with providing the books that I need for school or lunch or bus money... That is why I am not at school most of the time. (S3G4)

Another student who experiences financial difficulties added:

...I cannot concentrate in college because I do not even have the books to study from... have to be asking my friends to lend me their books and notes so that I can do my assignments... my mother just does not have enough money for books... and sometimes I have to stay home for a few weeks because I don't have transport money to come to college... I do not live near the college... so I miss college on some days... (SIG1)

Similarly, another participant added:

...though de government helps with our tuition fees... what we have to pay is still much and it is sometimes difficult for my mother who is a single parent to afford it when I have to start the semester at college. The tuition fees is more than my mother can afford and for this reason I work part-time so that I can try pay for de school... it is not enough so sometimes I miss college and miss out on important information. (S5G3)

Parental income as an indicator of resource availability is seen to determine the level of students' participation in college. Participants are distracted from their learning because of

their inability to afford important learning resources and other related educational support systems necessary for the improvement of their learning and achievement. This finding links to Archer *et al.* (2007), assertions that male students coming from a background of inadequate resources are placed at a disadvantage because they are unable to acquire the tools that promote upward mobility.

All the student participants felt that the lack of financial support limits their ability to attend college on a regular basis. They indicated that many of them come from single parent homes where resources are not readily available and this makes attendance at college on a regular basis very difficult. Participant (SII1) added:

...so many of us come from single parent homes... it is hard when only one person working in the home... and sometimes they don't work for a few months... that is difficult because then I don't have any money to come to college... (SII1)

These findings link to the work of Strand (2010) that shows that student access to the resources necessary to participate both in the home and learning environment are hindered by socioeconomic background. Limited financial support cause participants in the present study to engage less with the learning process, resulting in underachievement or postponement or departure from learning at different levels within their college education as expressed by one of the study participants:

...Because I do not have money to come to college all the time, I miss a lot of class time, I find it difficult to catch up with college work and I believe that is the reason why my grades are so low... (SII4)

When participants within the focus groups were asked whether they have requested any form of financial assistance to help with obtaining resources for college, the majority of them seem to harbour negative perceptions about seeking financial assistance, as they believe that there is a stigma attached to asking for assistance as one student participant indicated:

...I know that I don't have money to support my college education... but I not going to ask for financial help ... If I do that, the other students will know that I don't have and

then they will treat me differently... oh, I don't think I can handle that... it is like I will look like charity... yes, I don't have but I not going to ask for it. (SII2)

Participant (SII2), like other participants in this research, felt that even though he has difficulty with accessing the money to support his college education, he is not prepared to ask for help from anyone '*but I not going to ask for financial help ...*' for two very specific reasons. Firstly, he does not want others to know that he is not financially able and, secondly, because of the fear that he will be treated differently by his peers.

When asked by the researcher why it is so important that their financial status is not made known, participants expressed that other persons do not have to know their economic status, because they want to be seen the same way as everybody else, as articulated below:

...no one has to know that I do not have... I am not sure I will be able to handle the situation if others found out about my financial situation... if we are like everybody else it's ok... no one looks at us differently... if they find out I will not be able to hang out with them... (SIG2)

This response demonstrates students' awareness of their social class (Bourdieu, 1986) and gives an indication of the frustration that some students feel when they perceive that they would be judged by their peers for belonging to a different socioeconomic class. It also reveals the tension and internal conflict that some students experience when they have to disclose their economic status '*... If I do that, the other students will know that I don't have and then they will treat me differently... oh, I don't think I can handle that*'. Under these circumstances, they often choose not to ask for financial help out of fear of being rejected by their peers.

Students do not want to be judged because it would be seen as losing their cultural and social identity '*if we are like everybody else it's ok... no one looks at us differently... if they find out I will not be able to hang out with them...*'. This response suggests that for some students, refusal of financial assistance invariably affects their academic outcomes and engagement within the learning environment. While access to economic capital has been viewed as influencing student retention and academic achievement (Harrison et al., 2007), the findings of

that study show that the students are not appreciative of the economic capital at their disposal. This disparity highlights that financial assistance reinforced the idea of social capital inequality to which most low income students do not want to be ascribed.

Financial assistance is important especially for students of low socioeconomic means because it lessens the hardships that they experience and helps them focus on their studies, enhancing their academic performance (Bowes et al., 2014). Findings from this current study, however Contradict Bowes et al's (2014) conclusions, as the study reveals that while financial support is important to participants, accessing support exposes participants low socioeconomic status and lack of economic capital, which is a source of concern and embarrassment for participants. As such accessing support is undesirable altogether '*... but I not going to ask for financial help ... If I do that, the other students will know that I don't have and then they will treat me differently... yes, I don't have but I not going to ask for it..*.' In this regard, students' cultural capital and social identity are more beneficial than students' desire to utilise funding as a means to academic achievement. The access to economic capital was meant to extinguish social capital inequalities as espoused by Bourdieu (1986), however in this research it was seen to intensify social capital inequalities.

When the researcher asked participants whether they had approached lending institutions to assist them with some form of financial aid, all student participants indicated that it is very difficult for them to access financial assistance because they are students and institutions do not trust students to repay their debt. All student participants feel that financial institutions ask for a significant initial deposit which they cannot afford as indicated in these responses below:

...it is difficult for me (and many others like me) to get money from the banks or other lending places because these places ask for so much collateral which my parents cannot afford and so it makes no sense to even try to get financing for my education... (S1G5)

...here at college there are some avenues for assistance but there are so many of us asking for assistance that only a few get it... Without assistance, it is near impossible to attend college regularly ... (S2G5)

While some studies have shown that access to financial support is viewed positively, as it aids in elevating academic performance of students (Bowes et al., 2014), the findings of the current study show that accessing financial support for education is difficult and viewed negatively by students, as most lenders feared the non-repayment of the accessed loans. High interest rates and long repayment schedules also deter students from accessing finances to help with their academic needs. The perceptions that student participants in this study have about loans is that they are meant only for those who can afford them and that accessing student loans is far beyond their reach, as is illustrated by this student participant's response:

... dem loan repayments too high and then they take too long to pay back... it is a conspiracy... I think that them loans only for students who can afford... how they expect poor people to take dem loan... we cannot afford that ever... (S114)

Participants find it emotionally stressful going through the process of obtaining financial assistance, illustrating that the lack of trust from financial institutions deters them from even approaching the institutions. However, as illustrated below, some participants show some level of resilience by looking for part-time work to pay for their studies instead of waiting for finances to be made available to them:

Naah, no bank go give me a loan for school when they know me eh have the money to pay dem back... so I not wastin' my time to approach them... it will just be disappointment after disappointment... so I will take a little work here and there to help out my situation... I will not risk a loan I cannot pay back... (S113)

Another student added:

I don't think taking a student loan is a wise idea... if I am not doing well now and I take the loan... what will happen when I do not succeed and cannot get a job to pay back the loan... taking a loan is just added expense for my family... it will not guarantee me a job when I finish college. (S114)

The findings of this research show that the absence of economic capital makes it very difficult for participants to participate effectively in the learning environment. These findings

support research by Callender and Jackson (2005) that show that individuals from low economic backgrounds are more averse to debt and are, therefore, not willing to access loan facilities. Additionally, this current study finds that taking a student loan would only be considered relevant if participants could identify it as an investment in human capital, which they do not. Participants are skeptical about taking student loans – *‘I don’t think taking a student loan is a wise idea... if I am not doing well now and I take the loan... what will happen when I do not succeed and cannot get a job to pay back the loan...’* – as they are not convinced that they will be able to get the jobs that would help with the repayment of the student loans. These findings highlight the importance of the possession of economic capital as proposed by Bourdieu (1986), if male students are to access and participate in tertiary education successfully. This further illustrates that the difference in economic capital and family income is strongly associated with the type of social class one belongs to (Martin, 2010).

Similarly, these findings also support research by Archer et al. (2007) that contends that within higher education, the lack of access to financial resources hinders student investment in their education. Furthermore, this inability to purchase advantage and academic mobility exacerbates inequalities in tertiary/higher education.

Teacher perspectives on access to financial assistance also show that participation and retention in college is possible when financial access is made available to students, as one teacher indicated:

Many of my students face financial challenges especially with paying their tuition fees... without this they cannot get access to class and they miss out on the college experience... but for those who are able to get some sort of assistance to pay for college, for example, those getting government bursaries and corporate scholarships, their grades seem to get better, they are motivated, they come to school regularly and seem to participate in college activities though not all the time. (IIT4)

As teachers are the agents who work constantly with students, they are able to identify students in need of financial assistance. These students are characterised as those who miss college constantly and register poor grades as. On the other hand, teachers express that those

who are able to get financial assistance show more progress and motivation towards learning. While this study shows that male students' college experiences are greatly affected by the lack of adequate financial assistance, the findings also support indirectly other studies that have shown that students' persistence for achievement is greatly enhanced when students recognise that continuing assistance is contingent upon their performance (Hurtado *et al.*, 2006).

4.5. Theme 4: Student Motivation

From the data analysed in this research, the lack of motivation emerges as a theme identified as a contributing factor to male student underachievement. Both student participants and teachers acknowledge that within the learning environment, students are neither motivated by the college curriculum, their teachers, nor by the success of their peers as expressed below:

We know that girls in the class are doing better than us... they get good grades, but that does not really matter to us... we don't have to prove ourselves, but one thing is for sure, if administration changed what they teach us we would be more motivated to learn... and also if teachers delivered the content in a way that we could relate to, I think we would be motivated to perform better than we are now. (SII1)

Two of the student participants talked about what demotivates them within the college learning environment. They expressed that they are aware that the female students are performing much better than they are but, according to them, that does not motivate them at all because they have nothing to prove to anyone, unlike the female students. They are more concerned that what they are being taught in college is not challenging enough '*if administration changed what they teach us we would be more motivated to learn*' and that teacher strategies used to deliver content are not engaging enough.

However, one of the teachers offered a different view:

...I wish that the students would take their learning seriously, and put in the effort that is required... from my experience, a lot of our students, especially the male students, have issues dealing with their learning because they are really not motivated by anything related to school... they do not like school, they do not like to challenge themselves to get better at their studies... they are just not motivated and it is challenging for us teachers because we have to find ways to motivate them. It is really difficult, but at this stage of their learning they should really try to motivate themselves ... (ITI6)

Unlike student participants, teachers feel that students are not making the effort to motivate themselves. Teachers feel that it is extremely difficult to motivate students who are not interested in learning. While they are aware that it is imperative to get students in a frame of mind to take interest in their learning, it is equally important for students to take responsibility for their own learning as well.

Teachers opine that the lack of motivation stems from student inability to take responsibility for their learning. Teacher (ITI 1) stated:

...Students are generally not motivated to do anything if they do not know how to take responsibility for the things that they do; they are unresponsive to what matters most – their education, but most of all they do not want to put in the effort that will help them succeed academically... (ITI1)

These findings show that the lack of motivation hinders participants' learning and causes the deterioration of their educational standards (Awan et al., 2011). From the teachers' perspective, it is revealed that male students are not self-determined and not intrinsically motivated to want to achieve. While research has shown that intrinsic motivation is more

conducive to learning (Ryan and Deci, 2002), the findings of this study show that extrinsic, and not intrinsic motivation, is more conducive for participants, as those external motivators enhance their sense of self. As one student explained:

...I know if I motivate myself I can get some good grades... but for some of us, motivation for academic success is not really their focus... staying in school is not so much to perform in school work but making sure that we can look good and are seen as important in front of our friends and most importantly the girls... (SII1)

Another student participant added... *some of the young guys engage in illegal things to get money to impress the girls... some of the boys just come to college for that purpose and when they do this it makes them feel important. (SII3)*

As indicated in the participant's response above, male students are motivated extrinsically by outcomes not necessarily related to academic achievement. Maintaining a social network of friends, especially females, is a motivating factor first and foremost for some of the male students. However satisfying, this motivator means that some students participate in illegal activities in the form of drug sales (external motivator) in order to enhance their macho lifestyle used to attract female students (positive outcome). The current study shows that the external motivators play a significant part in determining male student participate in learning. External motivator are perceived to be more beneficial to students as they can stay in school and maintain their social relationships without having to actively participate in the learning environment. These relationships demand a significant amount of students' time; the more female relationships male students have, the greater their level of acceptance amongst their peers. This finding shows that the extrinsic motivation experienced by students is counterproductive to their academic success as it encourages the development of social behaviour that distracts them from the achievement of their goals, as a second year student commented:

...You know, some of us male students come to college not to learn and improve our grades but to make sure that we have a good clique of friends and above all have the

attention of the female students. It goes without saying that the more females around us the better our image is. (SII2)

This finding supports the self-determination theory that illustrates the importance of engaging in an activity as a means to an end, and not necessarily because the activity is intrinsically motivating (Ryan and Deci, 2002). However, a different perspective on the role that external motivators play in determining students' choice to stay and participate in college is expressed below:

I do not want to be here every day for the next two years... I am not motivated to come to school... however, I will still come because I know that at the end of the two years of school I will find a good job that will take me away from poverty into a better life. (SII1)

Student SII1 perceives a better life as a positive motivator. Despite his dislike for college, he makes the choice to stay and complete his education because he believes the outcome will benefit him. Internalising the benefits to be derived by staying in college shows how the students' external source of motivation (in this case finding a good and rewarding job) progressively changes into personal value. It is at this stage that the students' extrinsic motivator becomes as positive as the intrinsic motivator, motivating the students to stay in college.

This finding concurs with Deci and Ryan's (2002) research that informs that not all extrinsic motivation is undesirable. However, if students could internalize the benefits of being intrinsically motivated it would translate into better educational outcomes for them.

A related theme which emerges also from the present research that links intrinsic motivation to student achievement is self-efficacy. Findings in this research show that students' low self-efficacy contributes to their underachievement as expressed by three student participants below:

...I don't think that I am good enough to get on the dean's list... I am always trying to get good grades but nothing seems to work... perhaps I need to do something else instead of thinking how to get good grades... (SII2)

...when you live in a poor neighborhood, and you identify with the life in there, it is very difficult to even think that you can make it through your first year in college... I want to have a good life but I cannot do it because I don't have any support... my teachers don't even think that I will pass my courses... I am struggling with college and cannot cope with the other students ... I am not sure if I will come back next semester... it's just too much for me... (SII4)

...I am on academic probation... I do not have the confidence in myself that I can get better grades. I study but my grades never seem to improve... (SII1)

These findings above show that students exert less effort in the completion of academic tasks because they believe that they are incapable of doing well. Their confidence is challenged when they have to interact with other students from different backgrounds and learning capabilities, which arouses their fears of intellectual inferiority fueled by their belief that their socioeconomic background limits their ability to achieve academically. Additionally, the lack of confidence makes students unsure of themselves and their capabilities, which manifests within the learning environment through their low GPA scores and underachievement. While Strelniek (2005) argues that a relationship exists between socioeconomic background and self-efficacy on academic achievement and that self-efficacy accurately predicts female student academic success, the findings of the current research show, however, that male students' low self-efficacy negatively influences academic success. Relatedly, research by Kusurkar et al, (2010) also show that male students have lower intrinsic and higher extrinsic motivation, thus the reason for their underachievement. Such findings illustrate the importance of enhancing male students' intrinsic motivation to achieve better academic outcomes.

In this research, the students' individual experiences of low self-efficacy within the learning environment are reinforced when students demonstrate a lack of confidence in self and their capacity to achieve. These experiences are heightened by the absence of positive support systems within the home, as well as the lack of positive relationships within the college (teachers) that enhance intrinsic motivation. Student participants acknowledge that self-efficacy is a necessary component to sustaining their academic career, and affirm that

motivation within the academic environment would be greatly enhanced if they had confidence in their teachers. This was articulated by two of the student participants:

...it is difficult enough to pass a course when you are not sure of what you are doing and you are receiving very little assistance... if any at all from your teachers... I know that I can do much better if my teachers believed in me... (SII2)

...I need to know that my teachers are there to support me... but as of now I do not think that is happening... most of the teachers here only for the money and not for us specifically. (SII5)

Participants' approval of a motivating and caring teacher is significant as these positive characteristics help change their attitude toward the learning environment. This experience illustrates that, once students are motivated either through verbal encouragement or through assessment assistance, their level of self-efficacy increases. As espoused by Bourdieu's (1986) cultural capital concept and Young, Glogowska and Lockyer's (2007) study that examines staff and student experiences of attrition in higher education, when student's cultural capital is valued by the institution's staff, students transition more readily, adapt to the environment and perform better academically.

Posing one of the greatest motivational challenges for participants in this research is the curriculum which does not challenge male students' creativity because of its highly theoretical nature and limited opportunity for practical experience as articulated by one student:

...the curriculum is too loaded with content... stuff that is really not necessary... the course work does not challenge me... it is too rigid, demotivating and does not meet my needs... I am very creative... the curriculum just not working for me... I feel that I really wasting my time here. (SII4)

Describing the curriculum as 'rigid' and 'inadequate' illustrates the student's belief that the curriculum is not flexible or malleable and fails to meet his personal, social or academic needs. According to participant SII4, the potential of the curriculum to motivate him is limited because it does not challenge his academic potential and, at the same time, limits his mental

and physical creativity. Additionally, other student participants view a rigid curriculum as one that encourages inattentiveness, disorganization, and lack of interest as one student narrated:

...what they make us study is boring... I lose focus all the time because I don't know what the teacher is talking about... We do the same thing all the time and I just feel frustrated... there is no flexibility in what we learn... most times I am totally blank during class discussions because I just do not understand why I have to learn some of these things. (S112)

Conceptualising the curriculum as being inflexible and impersonal, student (S112) expressed frustration with the course content which is restrictive in focus and not student friendly, thus transferring little effort to the acquisition of knowledge related to course content. Consequently, the student's lack of motivation fortifies the perception that the curriculum is of little value to his future development.

In relation to teaching and learning, while McCoach and Siegel's (2003) research attributes increased student motivation to the value students place on what they are doing, or the value of the outcome, the present research illustrates that students lack intrinsic motivation towards understanding and navigating the curriculum, resulting in frustration and boredom. When the students do not have clear goals, as illustrated by the value they place on the curriculum, they demonstrate the inability to exert effort toward their academic achievement. The findings here agree with research of McCoach and Siegel (2003), and Pintrich and Schunk (2002) that student learning is enhanced once they are significantly motivated by the learning environment.

However, evidence from teachers in the present research shows that a flexible curriculum would not achieve its objectives if students exert little effort on their learning experience:

...there is nothing wrong with the curriculum, it is flexible and in my opinion meeting the needs of the students... students however need to adjust to what is provided and put in

the required effort so as to appreciate the contents of the curriculum... students need to motivate themselves in order to achieve at this level... (ITI1)

The analysis of the data in this research shows that self-motivation and self-discipline are attitudes students need to have in order to navigate the curriculum and the learning environment. Navigating through the many college courses challenges participants' ability to stay focused and motivated resulting in little effort being expended toward the achievement of their academic goals, and, because of their lack of appreciation for the curriculum, they show little mastery of their college courses.

One teacher who believes that the curriculum has its limitations stated the following:

...the curriculum does not include aspects that really cater to male student needs... however if male students need to achieve and improve their grade, they would need to motivate themselves... (ITI2)

Faced with difficulties related to Conceptualising what they are being taught, student participants in this research opt to disengage from the learning process by withdrawing and not utilising their independent learning skills to help improve their academic outcomes. However, from the teachers perspectives students need to be intrinsically motivated in their learning environment in order to grasp what is being taught. This view was also reflected by one of the teachers in the current study:

...teachers need to understand that students look up to them even at the college level... students crave their attention and encouragement and if this is not forthcoming students tend to disengage in the learning process... we have to support our students sufficiently so that they are able to motivate themselves... if we encourage and support them, there is the likelihood that they will begin to show signs of improvement. (IIT4)

All the student participants revealed that the current curriculum being taught is a source of demotivation for them. They feel that the college curriculum needs to be expanded to include more practical aspects. The curriculum is too heavy on theory which students are not

very comfortable with. It is too 'loaded' with content and no provision for meaningful course work to support their daily lives. All participants, in all of the focus groups, articulated that:

...if there were a blend in the curriculum to include more hands-on practical subjects as part of each student's course component it would help them concentrate better and appreciate the curriculum better...

All the student participants were of the opinion that the curriculum is too rigid, not relevant, and does not really meet their needs or the needs of the work environment, as indicated in the response below:

...most of our courses are theoretical courses... We want to do subjects that challenge us and these reading subjects do not do that, we want more physical college related activities but the institution does not provide them – no basketball teams, no volleyball, no soccer nothing. (S1G3)

Because the majority of the courses in the curriculum demand a lot of reading, participants tend to shy away from them and spend little time and effort in studying those subjects:

...the courses in college are too theoretical and require a lot of reading – I just do not like to read... I prefer to work on my computer as I can be creative... it is more excitingmy mind is active... (S1I5)

Another student expressed:

The theory that I learn here frustrates me and will not help me in any way... We want to learn things that we can do as soon as we go out there, not things in a text book that were written such a long time ago... I need to use my hands otherwise I feel really frustrated and angry... (S1I3)

The student participants above feel frustrated that they are not being challenged mentally and, as a result, they are not able to think critically. They need to be doing courses

that keep them engaged and motivated. They want to experience the practical environment that requires more hands-on practice and is applicable to everyday life.

While most student participants are demotivated with the curriculum and anything related to college, some students, especially the higher performing student participants, indicate that while they too are not happy with the curriculum, they are still able to motivate themselves and engage in the content. For them, being demotivated about college or the curriculum is not an option as indicated below:

...the curriculum needs to change, it must change otherwise a lot of our friends will not get through their courses. The curriculum does not motivate but I find ways of making it interesting.... I have to motivate myself in order for me to remain focused. I cannot be demotivated... I need good grades for me to change my life so I have to motivate myself... (SII5)

When teachers were asked to comment on the curriculum and its structure, two of the teachers interviewed agreed that the content of the curriculum is not challenging enough for male students as it limits their level of self-expression. The teachers felt that the curriculum was outdated especially now in the age of technology. They are of the opinion that students would perform better if they did courses and programs that encourage their creativity. One of the teachers stated:

...I do believe that students need a curriculum that encourages practical hands on experiences... a curriculum that focuses on the appreciation of real life experiences and one that is relevant to every day experiences. Students needed also to experience activities outside of the theoretical curriculum that would challenge them mentally and physically. (IIT5)

The second teacher expressed that

We must look at what the students need now..... the curriculum must reflect what students need to know and how they are going to use that knowledge in the real world..... if it means that students move away from the traditional classroom into the

digital world ... and that makes their learning more appropriate than this is where the curriculum should go. (IIT8)

Recognising, however, that the curriculum has its limitations, the teachers agree that the responsibility was theirs to create a learning environment that cater to the different learning styles of male students. They felt that the curriculum is not adequate in its approach to student development, but felt that if students are to achieve continued academic success, teachers would have to alter their teaching strategies to find the appropriate balance between the theory and the practical that would engage students in the learning process. The curriculum therefore constrains students' ability to engage within tertiary education and shows the interrelation between student agency and structure in changing student behaviour in the learning environment (Giddens, 1984).

The findings suggest a curriculum mismatch within tertiary education that does not meet the needs of male students. This finding aligns with a MSTTE, (2011) research study in Trinidad and Tobago that examined factors affecting student re-entry into post-secondary and tertiary education. The research found that students expressed disappointment and frustration with the inadequate 'hands-on' experience provided by the curriculum. The disconnect between course description and actual instruction influence student motivation and participation in tertiary education.

4.6. Theme 5: Student-Teacher Relationship

The dual themes of teachers' attitude and stereotyping emerging from the analysis of the data are viewed by student participants as factors that negatively influence their academic achievement. When the researcher asked participants to comment on teacher attitude and behaviour towards male students, the student participants expressed that they view teachers as uncaring and oblivious to their needs. While they appreciate their teachers' vast knowledge base, emotional support from teachers was not forthcoming. They feel that teachers ignore the

efforts that male students make during class discussions and focus mainly on students who seem to be achieving. As one student indicated:

...I believe that my teachers ignore us in class. They think we are useless and cannot do well... they focus on the female students who have better grades than us and ignore us totally... (SII4)

Another student added:

...teachers do not care about us because we are not bright in class. They focus on the bright students and do not really expect much from us, anyway... when we are not clear with explanations given during lectures and ask for assistance the teachers behave as though we are wasting their time and that makes us feel that we cannot learn. (SII6)

One of the students in the focus group felt that teachers unconsciously humiliate and embarrass them through their actions toward them, and also in the way that they speak to them, creating an uncomfortable learning atmosphere, which they internalise to mean that the teachers are stereotyping them as learners, as expressed by the student participant:

...when I try to contribute to class discussions, the teacher does not acknowledge my contributions and simply ignores me in front of the class. This makes me feel embarrassed and not want to participate anymore... it makes me feel that I don't know anything at all... (SII3)

Another student added:

...teachers are supposed to be supportive and helpful and understanding with students... be able to understand what the students need and work with them to achieve it... the teachers have the ability to do that... some of them are just interested in getting a pay check at the end of the month and don't see that us students have a contribution to make... we try our best to understand some of these teachers but it is difficult... so most times if I cannot understand the teacher I just don't do the work. (SII4)

Student participants were very vocal about how some of the teachers treat them. They feel that teachers concentrate more on the female students as they are the ones who participate more in class discussions. They believe that teachers have no empathy or patience, and treat them as though they cannot learn. Teachers, according to them, do not try to understand them and this causes tension and internal conflict.

Participants in the focus groups also indicated that they feel a sense of rejection and social isolation stemming from their belief that teachers have low expectations of them and their ability to achieve. They are of the opinion that teachers do not show much concern for their achievement, evidenced through teachers' lack of acknowledgement and assistance to male students in the learning environment. Consequently, the limited teacher-student interactions create communication barriers caused by the social distance between teachers and students where students feel neglected and abandoned (Tran, 2010). Participants feel uncomfortable approaching teachers for academic assistance, making it easy for students to disengage within the learning environment.

One individual student indicated:

...I do not feel comfortable going to ask for course assistance from some of my teachers, they are not very helpful... in some cases you cannot even communicate with them because they cannot come down to our level... this is so frustrating... it makes me feel that I am not good enough to approach them... (SII...)

Baslanti's (2008) study of Turkish university students' underachievement also finds that underperforming students believe that their teachers have unfavorable views of them, and also shows that there was nothing they could do to gain the teachers' confidence or assistance with their academic work. The findings in the present research show that the relationship between students and teachers determines the attitude that students have towards learning. In essence, it explains the structured relations that they have with each other (Thomas, 2002). Such findings highlight the negative effects of institutional habitus on student behaviour. When students feel that their teachers undervalue their knowledge, they disengage from the learning process and ultimately underachieve.

The findings in the current research also reveal that teachers' unprofessionalism and inadequate pedagogical skills alienate students from engagement within the classroom as they are unable to initiate communication or dialogue with teachers whom they believed lacked character and are in their words 'classless'. Students are critical of teachers' unethical behaviour and maintain that those unprofessional teachers lack the ability to institute positive changes in their lives. Because of this, students disengage during the teachers' lecture lessons, which they note does affect how they perform in that particular course. One of the individual participants indicated:

...one of my teachers cannot be my role model, she doing worse things than I doing so how am I supposed to think that she can teach me anything? Me, I come to her class but I not learning anything from her... her life not good so I learning nothing from her... she cannot teach, anyway, and no one like her teaching... she cannot help me in my life or my studies so why should I listen to her. (SII4)

One of the 5 achieving participants further added:

....When I come to class, I like to know that my teacher can work with me, that she knows what she is doing and is not confused about the content she is teaching. I feel confident in a class where I know the teacher is confident... (SII7)

Although this participant was critical of teachers' behaviour, he acknowledges that teacher professionalism is an important factor that influenced his self-efficacy and motivation to engage in the learning process. All the participants prefer teachers who were approachable, knowledgeable, student-friendly, and professional, as these characteristics are viewed as essential for encouraging positive students' academic outcomes (Voss et al., 2007).

Additionally, the findings in this research reveal that expectations of teachers' quality are also of concern to students. Participants report that they do not perform well when they perceive that teachers are unable to deliver content effectively; are not engaging during classroom discussions and lack enthusiasm while teaching:

I cannot understand what my instructor teaches... he does not explain himself well enough for us to understand and expects us to know what he is saying... and likes to tell us you should know this and that... but how are we to know that when he just talks to himself most of the time? I think he does not have any real interest in if we learn the content or not... (SII3)

Another student added:

...when de instructor comes to class he does not have any discussion about our previous class... he just writes on the board and talks to himself... he does not provide us with the course syllabus so we are not even sure that we are learning the correct information... he rushes us through the course... I don't think I know enough to get a good job like some of the other students... (SII5)

Participants believe that their learning and academic progress would improve if teachers were to provide more emotional and informational support. Teachers are responsible for providing knowledge, skills and values within the learning environment. The student's (SII5) response above underscores the need for teachers to deliver academic content effectively to enhance students' chances of successfully competing with other students in the learning environment. Invariably, teachers' inability to deliver content effectively, limits students' knowledge base and contributes to students' low performance and inability to conceptualise and transfer skills necessary for academic, and job related performance, as expressed by the student's response: *'I don't think I know enough to get a good job'* (SII5).

The above findings illustrate that the inefficiency in delivering content hinders low achieving students from reaching their potential, as they do not possess the cultural competence to compete for educational credentials that legitimise the dominant culture (Sullivan, 2002). As a result, underachieving participants in this research develop a negative habitus toward their education and this, according to them, contributes to their low academic achievement.

In analysing the data in this research, it was found that teacher had negative expectations of the male students, and their ability to achieve which, according to participants, contributes to their low academic achievement. Three student participants feel that their ability to achieve is challenged when they realise that teachers have low expectations of them, and they believe continuous exposure to such knowledge increases their vulnerability in the learning context as expressed by one student:

...it is difficult for me to perform well when the teacher always refers to me as one of the lazy boys... they always think that because we are young men we are badly behaved and cannot perform at a high standard... the teacher considers the girls in the class better than we are and pay more attention to them

The participant further stated that the teacher:

... hardly assisted because... she thinks we are lazy and not able to do as well as the girls... (SII4)

Similarly, another student participant added:

... my teacher advised me that I would have to work extremely hard because young men usually do not do well and always failed their courses. (SII6)

From the conversations with the focus group participants, it is revealed that the majority of them are of the opinion that their teachers see them as failures and individuals who cannot learn and, as a result, the teachers give them less time and attention. One of the participants further expressed that he feels that the teachers are stereotyping them as expressed in his response below:

...teachers do not think very much of us, they still think we cannot learn.... And believe that we are like all other lazy boys... and this is not true... (SII1)

When made acutely aware of their low performance, the student participants in this study face the threat of not doing well on a continuous basis causing a level of anxiety (Steele et al., 2002) that makes them unsure of why they are attending college in the first place.

...if teachers always think that we cannot do as well as the other students... it makes us think that we are really that bad... this makes me feel that there is no reason why I should be here... (SII6)

The findings illustrate that participants feel the pressure of being associated with the stereotype, as well as conforming to the stereotype of male student performance overall. The findings also show that students express a certain degree of frustration and anger: *'I don't like the way teachers always think that because we are young men we are badly behaved'* (SII4) when associated with the stereotype, consequences of which lead to participant demotivation, disengagement, and decreased academic performance. The level of frustration is heightened when participants harbour thoughts about the stereotype which lead to disinterest within the classroom:

... I am constantly thinking that I will not be able to do well because the instructor always says I cannot do well... It's like in secondary school I was not able to do well in mathematics because my teacher always said that none of us would pass it because we were not good enough... that is the same thing here... if everyone else believes that we are not doing well... and we believe it as well... then it does mean that we really cannot do well... I sometimes say that I can't do it anyway because that is the way it is and so... (SII6)

All the participants internalise that the expectation of doing poorly, in any given task, leads to the poor performance of that given task. Additionally, the findings also give credence to the participants' belief that when society – *'everyone else'* – labels them as underachievers it fortifies their belief that it is a correct representation of self; a belief that leads to lack of motivation and poor academic performance experienced by students in this study.

This finding supports the analysis of Wout et al.'s (2008) stereotype threat which suggests that if the targets of the negative stereotype believe that their stereotype exists, then the consequence of the stereotype becomes real to them. The findings of this research are also consistent with the research of Cadinu et al. (2005) which found that performance is increased or decreased depending on the intensity of agreement with the stereotype.

When teachers were asked to comment on whether they stereotype male students, one of the teachers indicated that the stereotype of male students is present and exists within the college and cannot be entirely eliminated as the stereotype is deeply entrenched in the social and cultural make-up of the society and is resistant to immediate change as indicated below:

...the perception that male students do not perform well is nothing new for them or for the education system... this has been the reality since boys started failing and unable to balance themselves... this perception about the males and their academic performance will only change when male students begin to show signs of improvement... and in my opinion that will take a very long time. (IT12)

Another teacher added

...not everyone stereotypes male students.....male students have the ability to do what they have to do to get successful grades.....they just do not put in the required effort....and it is not because the teachers do not try...we do try But if male students opt not to work hard ...they are responsible for their own failure.... how can you blame the teacher who has been trying so hard...(IT11)

The findings highlight that teachers recognise student failure, *'this has been the reality'* and *'they just do not put in the required effort'*. However teachers are of the view that student failure is as a consequence of their deliberate actions of not working hard and putting in the effort. As such teachers refuse to take the blame for student failure by suggesting that students are responsible for their own failure. This finding is consistent with Lawrence (2005) suggestions that teachers consciously dissociate themselves from the blame of student failure by locating the blame on students themselves.

The findings in the current research also suggest that students want and need the support from their teachers to help them fit into their new learning environment *'teachers are supposed to be supportive and helpful and understanding with students... be able to understand what the students need and work with them to achieve it... '*. However for students to fit into the tertiary environment, they need to be independent thinkers and learners, taking

responsibility for their learning, of which participants in this research are not. This suggests a disparity between what students expect from their teachers and learning environment and what students are actually putting in, in terms of effort towards academic success. The findings contradict Leese's (2010) findings that students' knowledge of an increased work load prepared them to become independent learners taking responsibility for their own learning.

4.7. Theme 6: Study Habits and Time-Management

The inability to identify appropriate study habits is a theme that emerges from the data in this research. Both student participants and teachers talk about how poor time-management, and ineffective study habits, impact on students' academic achievement. The student participants admit that they do not know how to prepare a proper study plan or prioritise their college courses. As such, they shift their interest to other activities that interfere with their ability to utilise their time effectively. As one student expressed:

...If I knew how to manage my time well I would be able to balance college and other activities...most times the other activities take over my time....and college work suffers.. (SII2)

Another student further added:

...I know I am not putting enough time towards my studies and that is because some courses are just so boring... but college has so many courses and I am not sure which one should take my attention first... I did not know that college would be this difficult... (SII7)

The participants' responses show that they have difficulty managing their time, and setting realistic goals, an indication that they lack prior knowledge about the challenges involved in pursuing tertiary education. Unlike their previous secondary school experiences, college demands a certain type of personal discipline relating to the management of time, which would help them cope with the academic challenges. They acknowledge that putting in

the extra effort would improve their chances of success but this is hindered by the lack of motivation experienced while studying for some of their courses.

...I know that one of the reasons why I am not doing so well is because I do not put as much effort as I should. I know that if I put in the effort my grades will be higher... (SI14)

Another student added:

...I have a lot of difficulty trying to study because I do not know how to plan and study adequately.... There are so many distractions. But the main problem for me is that I am not motivated to study all the time... I can study but it just takes too much time. If I had a good study plan I would be able to prioritize my work and get good grades. (SI15)

In analysing the data, the findings show that participants' poor study habits result in poor planning of study and examination schedules that challenge students' ability to remain focused and organised. Participants justified their shortcomings by the lack of knowledge about 'study planning skills'.

Participants however indicated that while they did not know how to construct an effective study plan they did study only when examinations were about to commence as indicated by one of the students in the focus group:

... usually I make the effort to study when examinations are around the corner....before that I do not study at all... I procrastinate most of the time and when the exams come I just have a little time to study... (SIY1)

Another student added:

...before coming to college I had no choice but to study... there was nothing else to do but study....at college I study only when I have to and that is usually just before exams...I know it is not the best thing to do but it is just not motivating to study all the time...(SIY3)

The above findings show that participants did not have regular study habits. Most participants expressed that because they did not have the interest in studying, they only

attempted to study when examinations were approaching. Participants acknowledged that they were aware of the consequences of procrastination but they blamed this on the lack of motivation. However some students indicated that they did make the effort to study but the nature of the content was confusing to them, as a result they opted to study only what was interesting to them. *'Most times I do not understand the content of the courses here at college..... I only focus on the courses that I like.. I do put in the effort but as my results show it is usually not enough.... (ISG3)*

When teachers were asked to comment on student study habits, they all indicated that underachieving students had one thing in common *' they do not put enough effort in their work and have very poor time management skills....thus the reason for their poor performance....(IT16)*

Another teacher added:

.... Students have ample opportunities to develop their study skills....in most classes they are encouraged to create simple schedules to help them study.... During orientation sessions they are made aware of the importance of having study schedules... While they do have issues with procrastination they have the intellectual ability to realize that this is not secondary school They have to put in the effort to study otherwise there are consequences. (IT18)

The above findings show that a key difference emerged between the views of teachers and students with regard to student study habits. While students perceived that their poor academic outcomes were influenced by their lack of planning and management skills, not all teachers were sympathetic toward students who did not put in the effort to organise their work schedules and manage their time effectively. These teachers were of the opinion that students had many opportunities to improve their study routine and positioned that students were intelligent enough to understand the consequences of their actions if they did not make the effort to prioritize their time and make the effort to study.

The findings however support the research of both Baslanti (2008) and Balduf (2009) whose findings underscore poor time management, and irregular study habits as reasons for students' academic underachievement. Baslanti's (2008) research shows that low motivation to

study, lack of persistence and irregular study habits encourage student underachievement. Similarly, Balduf's (2009) study findings show that most students are not prepared for the complex study schedules at the college level of education, had no persistence or desire to study, and spent less time and effort to become academically successful. Further the findings suggest that students did not possess the knowledge of appropriate study practices '*If I had a good study plan I would be able to prioritize my work and get good grades*' and did not put in the deliberate effort (study motivation) to help them concentrate on their academic work (Hurlburt et al., 1991).

4.8. Summary

The focus of this chapter has been to discuss students' and teachers' perceptions of academic achievement. A number of key themes emerge which show that students' underachievement centers on the limitations of their socioeconomic backgrounds and cultural capital which sees low parental education and lack of parental emotional support as impeding their academic success. Emerging also is students' vulnerability resulting from financial insecurities that negatively affected students' ability to stay focused and engaged in learning. Consequently, the relationship between parental background, parental education, and lack of financial support, illustrate how limited social capital creates a sense of hopelessness among students, making low academic achievement inevitable. What is significant, however, is the relevance of peer groups that provide the social capital support for positive academic achievement.

Extrinsic motivation is also a crucial factor in motivating students to stay and participate in the learning process. But it is also seen as counterproductive to their academic success as it encourages the development of social behaviour inconsistent with the achievement of academic goals. From students' perspectives, their low self-efficacy is reproduced when their confidence is challenged by their fears of intellectual inferiority, resulting from teachers' low expectations and negative expectations of students' capabilities. However, students'

perceptions of unprofessional teachers introduces the lack of trust in teachers' ability to institute positive change in student learning and argues the need for approachable, knowledgeable, and student friendly teacher-student relationships to help effect change in student academic outcomes. Negative student-teacher relationships were shown to impact students' learning. Students acknowledged that though these relationships motivated their early learning, developing trust in teachers in the current learning environment was challenging.

Students' inability to prepare for the challenges of college education, as evidenced by their lack of study, and time management skills, suggest the need for early intervention of institutional and academic support to help students improve their chances of academic success.

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the findings and discussion related to male student perceptions of their educational and social environment, and will examine in greater depth how male students see themselves as learners and conceptualize their learning environment. Further, through the analysis of semi-structured interviews with students, this chapter will explore students' expectations of the learning environment, the value of education, and the role that the learning environment plays in assisting underachieving male students. The intertwining relationship between students' background, past and present, significantly shapes students' outlook on future life and academic choices (James *et al.*, 2013) and will be discussed in more detail below.

The findings presented in this chapter are derived from the themes and sub-themes that emerged from the data analysis and are organized as follows: Section 5.2 – Theme 7: discusses students' prior learning which has implications on how they transition into their current learning environment; Section 5.2.1 examines the sub-theme- values that students place on the education that they receive, which gives an indication as to why male students may be predestined to underachieve; Section 5.3 discusses theme 8 - students' expectations of the learning environment; followed by Sections 5.3.1 and 5.3.2 that examines the sub-theme of the institution's ability to support student learning through financial guidance and support; Section 5.3.3 presents a discussion on institutional support services provided to students that impacts their academic achievement: the provision of after school programs (Remedial Education) is discussed as a sub theme in section 5.3.4. This chapter concludes with a summary of the key factors that impede male student participation and engagement in the learning environment, as well as the role that the learning environment plays in assisting underachieving male students.

5.2. Theme 7: Prior Learning Experiences

Emerging from the data analysed in this research is the theme on the experience of prior learning and the value of education. In analysing student prior learning experiences, the research found that teaching strategies, self-directed learning, rigid academic structure, and student-teacher relationships, were identified as experiences of prior learning that students considered critical for engagement and participation in tertiary education. With reference to students' prior learning, students in one of the focus groups offered the following comment:

...in secondary school, the teachers were the ones responsible for making sure that we did what we had to do... they directed our learning and basically told us what and when to study... this made our lives simple... but in a way we were not responsible for our learning... we just did what the teachers told us to do and we passed our examinations...

He further added that:

...it is different now. The teachers at the college just guide you... not like secondary school where they hold your hand... here you are supposed to take responsibility for yourself... I find it really difficult to adjust to this form of learning. (STIG2)

Another student offered the following comment:

...The teachers in secondary school used to do everything for us... we hardly did any research... so it was like having someone else think for you... here in college we have to do things for ourselves... there is so much research and I really don't think I can cope with all this work... it is not as simple as secondary school was. (STIG2)

....in secondary school it was very strict and we had to follow a strict timetable which in a way was good because we were able to know what to do and when...it just made life easier for us...but at the same time we did not think on our own....now I wish it was the same I would not be as confused... (Y1G5)

During the interviews with participants, what became evident is that students prior educational experiences do not adequately prepare them for the challenges of the college experience. For most of the participants, secondary school education had been too teacher-centred with little independent learning or thinking '*it just made life easier for us...but at the same time we did not think on our own*', and for some students the structure of learning severely compromises their ability to make sound academic decisions for themselves.

The statement above – "*find it really difficult to adjust to this form of learning*" – resonated with all the students including the higher achieving students. When students feel lost or confused in transition from secondary school to tertiary education, their motivation and focus are significantly reduced and they experience and encounter feelings of isolation (Longdon, 2004). As students transition from secondary to tertiary level of education they are presented with significant challenges apart from the normal academic demands. These challenges include more autonomy, more responsibilities, and additional workloads that students find difficult to adjust to.

It is evident from the above responses that students' prior learning experiences focused on directed learning which does not encourage students to take responsibility for their own learning. Teachers directed students' learning through the type of classes given, the structured assessments, and directed classroom activities which, according to participants, did not stimulate their learning and made students '*teacher dependent*' students (STI6). Participants further expressed that teacher dependency made them feel as though their lives were shaped by teachers (STI4). In other words, they believed they had no autonomy of thought.

In this research, students couldn't have been more vivid in their description of what they feel would enhance their ability to become self-thinkers and improve their academic achievement. Self-directed learning was perceived as one of the factors that determine whether a student would achieve or underachieve in higher education as noted by one of the achieving students:

...there is no push here... and you learn research and skills to understand your work on your own... teachers just guide you and if you do not take control of your learning, you can lapse on the work and this is what leads us to the point of frustration. (ST15)

Participants were aware that within the current learning environment, the teacher's role was significantly different from that experienced in prior learning, there is *no 'spoon feeding'* and teachers just guide the process of learning as opposed to *'holding one's hand'*, therefore the onus was now on students to take control of their learning in order to develop the skills and knowledge necessary to fit into the culture of the learning institution. That is, developing the proper study and work habits that would allow them to effectively engage in the learning environment. However, participants' perceived the process of self-directed learning as being extremely challenging *'I find it really difficult to adjust to this form of learning'*, and frustrating.

The findings above are consistent with Leese's (2010) research that finds students struggle with transition to higher education as they are not prepared to be independent thinkers as required by higher education. However, in order to *'fit in'* to the new learning environment that they find themselves in, students expressed the need for more structured activities and clear instructions about what is expected of them *'follow a strict timetable which in a way was good because we were able to know what to do and when..... now I wish it was the same I would not be as confused....* The paradox inherent in the present research and also in Leese's (2010) study is that on the one hand, the students wish to be left alone to develop capacity for independent thinking, whilst at the same time, they still need transition "crutches" in the form of support from Faculty.

In the present research, participants also had difficulty adjusting to an independent learning environment and the work that comes with it. This suggests that students lack the cultural capital to assist them sufficiently with adjusting to the institutional habitus, which meant that they lacked an understanding of the values and practices of the culture of the institution (Reay, David and Ball, 2001, 2005). This could also be linked to research by Lowe and Cook (2003) that found that students encounter difficulty adjusting to higher education, and

becoming independent learners because of their poor transition into university life, which contribute to student underachievement and dropout levels.

As highlighted by (STI5) above, *“if you do not take control of your learning, you can lapse on the work and this is what leads us to the point of frustration”*. Students perceive that transitioning can be taxing on their ability to focus, and in an effort to exercise self-discipline (Murad et al., 2010), frustration could drive them to despondency and lead to the lack of motivation to effectively engage in academic activities, leading to academic underachievement as experienced by students in the current research.

Interestingly, for some participants, taking control of their learning early is a priority so as to eliminate the experience of failure. Those students indicate that at secondary school their families had made it clear to them that failing school was not an option. The education they are being offered is a ticket to their future life, whether good or bad. This was expressed by one of the higher achieving students as follows:

...my school counselor told me how hard community college would be for me... so from secondary school I prepared myself for what I was going to face when I came to college... that's why, for me, it (this learning environment) isn't much more difficult from secondary school... (STI5)

Another high achieving student added:

...my sister attended the college and gave stories of failure... Those stories were scary... and I was scared... so I pushed myself not to take things easy from secondary school... So when I came here I started to do my work... I do not want to fail. (STI2)

From the analysis of the conversations with the students above, the findings show that for some students, their expectations about tertiary education are influenced by individuals who had cultural capital within the home and school environment such as the counselor, or other family members who are aware of what tertiary education entails (Kuh et al., 2006; Miller et al., 2006). Some students took the advice seriously to set tertiary learning as a major

milestone and priority in their life. These students have the social and cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990) from family members to move them in the right direction. However, for the majority of students, this is not the case as they demonstrate no knowledge of tertiary education and do not know how to study or navigate the new social grouping that might be extremely different from their level of social capital. To this end, one of the participants expressed the following:

...because I was not encouraged to take responsibility for my learning in secondary school, when I came to college I was totally confused... I still am confused... I do not know how to study on my own and I cannot even make study decisions without having stress... I procrastinate and have no sense of time and urgency... For me, secondary school did not teach me much about how to handle the challenges that I now face. (SI12)

Student participants made it clear that their previous learning experiences were centered on an organised timetable of activities, study times and compulsory study subjects. This, however was not necessarily the case in college, as creating a time table of academic activities, and study times was the preserve of the students.

...when we went to school, every minute of the day was accounted for... we knew what was to be done and when... it was easy... everything was easy... so there was really no stress or responsibility on our part... We just had to make sure that we had our homework done... but now, it is a totally different story... we have to do everything on our own... (ST14)

Another student added:

...we did not really have a choice of what we wanted to do at school... everything was structured... we just had to do what was given to us.... if I had the choice back then I would be able to handle college much better... (ST16)

The findings also illustrate that even though the students appreciate the ease at which they went through their secondary education, the rigid structure of their previous learning environment did not benefit them in any way 'secondary school did not teach me much about

how to handle the challenges that I now face'. But in assessing their prior learning, if participants had had a choice as to what they could have studied from as early as secondary school, they would be able to make better learning choices in their current education. That would have made it easier for them to adjust to the learning environment as they would have already had the experience of choice and knowing how to handle the choices they have made.

These findings reveal that students' prior learning experiences do not prepare them adequately for college and the challenges of tertiary education. Students lack the necessary cultural capital from their past learning experiences which make their expectations incongruent with the expectations of the current learning environment (Kreig, 2013).

5.2.1. The Value of Education

For the majority of the participants in this research, and especially the above average participants, receiving a college education is important because of the benefits accrued in terms of employment opportunities. Attending college would enhance their socioeconomic progression in life and community, while at the same time, grant them a sense of personal fulfilment and satisfaction. Student participants in responding to the researcher's question on the 'importance of education' to them expressed the importance of education in the following terms:

...I believe getting a college education will help me get a good job and I will be able to support my family... when I get that job I will move my family... getting from where we live now and take them to a better part of the city... Ya... that college education will give me that good job and I will also be able to send my brothers to school... (SY2)

...an education is important because I can get a job... without it, I am going to be just like my parents, going nowhere and being in that dead-end job that does not pay much... And besides, having a college education will make me look good in front of my family and my friends... they will respect me... (SY1)

Another participant further added:

...we all know that an education is important and necessary for us now to be able to get a job in this country... but it is even more important to get some education because it could be the difference between working and earning to help the family, or not working and having to experience the pressures of unemployment... (S4G2)

These findings revealed that both underachieving and above average participants see the value of having a good college education even though they come from disadvantaged backgrounds. For them, it is an opportunity for a good and respectable career, and the acquisition of a good job means that their cultural capital would improve. On the other hand, not having a college education means that they would remain in a static situation, similar to that of their parents who had no college education. But for these students, this was not a choice or option as revealed below:

...I do not want to be like my parents... not being able to change their current circumstances... it is not really their fault... and they cannot do any better as they do not have the means to do better... but I can change that if I educate myself... I want to do better than that... I do not want to be seen as a good-for-nothing individual... (SII4)

Nevertheless, one participant had a different view of college education as expressed in the following:

I am not sure if this college education is meeting my needs... the way I see it, this college education is really not necessary because anybody can get a job after they complete secondary school... I know persons who did not get a college education but have good jobs... so I really do not have to complete my college education. (SII3)

In the current research, participants showed the need to change their socioeconomic level in line with cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1990). If the socioeconomic status of students is enhanced, it would enhance their cultural capital, elevate their habitus, and remove the 'negative societal bracket' – a reference to the stigma of being a 'good-for-nothing individual' – (SII4). It is evident that the students' family circumstances motivate them to want to do better

for themselves. They are acutely aware of their family's financial situation and the need to reposition themselves within their social environment. These findings link to research done by Busher et al., (2014) which shows that learners place value on the socioeconomic benefits derived from education and that, as a result, they struggle for what they want to achieve in life. Busher et al. (2014) show that the interplay between individual student agency, their identity, institutional structures and social circumstances play a major role in shaping the struggle and transformation of adult learners.

5.3. Theme 8: Expectations of the College Environment

Students' expectation of the college environment is a significant theme that emerges from the analysis of the data in this research. When student participants were asked to comment on what they expected when they entered tertiary education, they overwhelmingly expressed that they are optimistic about their social and academic life, and enter the institution with expectations as to what the learning environment could offer them (Nelson, 2002). However, as previous literature has shown, students come to college with unrealistic expectations which, when not met, cause stress and anxiety. This is seen as incongruent with the expectations of the learning environment (Kreig, 2013). On the other hand Miller et al. (2006), show that when students' experiences and expectations of college are congruent, students' academic outcomes are positive. From the data analysis in this study, it is found that institutional guidance and student support services are central to male students' learning and achievement at tertiary levels of education, and that Students enter tertiary education with the expectation that their academic lives will be enhanced by institution's provision of a student friendly environment.

5.3.1. Institutional Guidance

A recurrent theme about institutional guidance resonates among all the student participants in this research. Institutional guidance, according to participants, includes the provision of orientation programs, financial guidance, and academic assistance programs. Student participants expected that as they entered into tertiary education, the institution would have in place adequate student orientation services, adequate financial guidance services, as well as after-school programs that would assist with the learning experience at the institution as the following student participant expressed:

. ...I came from a secondary school that did not provide any information about the things that happen in college... but I was convinced that college would be different. In fact, I was sure that when I joined the college I would be welcome and given an orientation about the college and what I was supposed to do... (SII2)

Other students also added:

...I know that when you join college, they are supposed to tell you about what they do and what they expect you to do... so you know or have an idea of what is expected of you... you can then decide what you want to do with it... that information gives you a choice and makes you more independent... I can decide if I want to do a course or program or not... (SII6)

Expressing similar thoughts, student participant SII1 added:

...my parents told me that college was a place where I could get all the information about how to pay for college and where I could get the money from... I liked that part because my parents have difficulty getting money to give me for my education... and I know that that information will benefit me and many others in the same situation like I am in... (SII1)

From the above conversations with the student participants, there was the common understanding that students' expectations about the institution, and what it could offer them as learners, was high. All student participants expected the institution to provide them with the career information that they did not know about or were unable to get in their prior learning and perceived the institution as a reservoir where they could obtain such information with ease and clarity.

Students in all focus groups made the point that the student orientation sessions are important as they provide the necessary information and guidance to assist students in their learning. ... *'Having an orientation of the college and the programs that they offer can benefit us students because we can get a lot of information to help us through our education... (ISG2)*. They view this as an integral support for the students entering into further and higher education as they make decisions about their future (McInnis, et al., 2000). The orientation sessions introduce students to faculty and resources needed to assist them with their academic success as alluded to by Mullendore and Bahahan (2005), and also introduce them to the learning environment and what is expected of them *'when I joined the college I would be welcome and given an orientation about the college and what I was supposed to do... (SI12)*

However, while the orientation sessions met the expectations of some students, the sessions failed to give other students information regarding study skills as expressed explicitly below by one individual participant:

...the college orientations are good... but it did not give me any information as to how to study or how to go about managing my time... I think that should be added to the agenda when students come to the college... if I was given such information when I first came here, I think I would have been doing so much better... (SIG2)

This student participant blames his poor academic performance on the lack of information about how to manage his time and study in such a demanding environment. He feels that there is need for the institution to ensure that such information is presented early and continuously to students so that they would be able to prepare themselves for the

challenging workloads of college education. This, he feels, would have given him and others some direction and he would not be struggling as he is at present '*... if I was given such information when I first came here, I think I would have been doing so much better... (SIG2).*

Summing up his idea of an effective orientation session, one student participant, SIG5 said:

...we need these sessions to help us cope with college and these sessions should not only be at the beginning of the college year but should be done periodically just to ensure that students are reminded about what needs to be done...

All student participants recognised that the orientation programs have some limitations such as being offered only once a year and not being very informative, and expressed the need for programs to be given in a timely manner. One of the individual participants stated; '*I am still confused about the need for orientation.....it is short and not very informative...most times whatever information we get is usually after the fact... so we are not able to be know much because orientation is not sufficient*' (SIG5)

The finding illustrates that students are aware of the importance of orientation programs. These results find resonance with the research of McInnis et al. (2000) which show that student uncertainties about the college experience arise as a result of the lack of proper information about the institution, unrealistic expectations about time management and academic workloads.

5.3.2. Financial Guidance

In response to a question concerning the institution's financial guidance mechanism for students, it was revealed that financial guidance is an important aspect that students expect the institution to provide. Student participants expressed concerns about their financial situations which they perceive to impact their daily college experiences, and they had believed that as they enter college the institution would guide them through the process of accessing

finances or at least give them direction as to where they could obtain finances to assist them during their learning journey. This was expressed by one student participant below:

...because of the part-time job that my mother has... I constantly worry about money... but I do believe that the college has financial information that can help me... (SIG4t)

Agreeing with the above observation, another student offered the following:

...before I came to the college, I knew that the college gave information about college and government bursaries... I have had financial assistance from the college now 2 years... It has made my life and my parents' life so much easier and more focused... (SII2)

Before coming to college, some students were aware that the institution had provisions for financially disadvantaged students, hence some of them made decisions about accessing college based on that information – *'I do believe that college has financial information that can help me'*. Other students were fortunate to have received information about the different financial avenues available and to have benefited from that information – *'I have had financial assistance ... for 2 years now'*. But according to student participant SII2, there are difficulties in obtaining such information. While he did not want to elaborate on what those issues are another student participant added:

...there are many students who do not need the financial information but would apply anyway for the assistance... some of the students who this get the assistance and others like myself who really need it cannot get it... that is not fair. (SII3)

The student participant, above, perceived that the financial information given is not specific enough and this allows other students who do not necessarily need the finances to qualify for assistance and this is of concern to him. He further stated *'the institution makes you sign forms about your financial situation if you want assistance but am not sure if they really check those applications to see if persons really need it... to me they are not providing proper financial information'*. This participant felt that there are loopholes in the way financial information is presented to them and this was not what he had expected.

When asked by the researcher what type of financial information the participants expected the institution to provide for them, one participant in the focus group, SIG4, replied:

...information about the college bursaries, when and where we could get them and if there were other places that we could go to get assistance... we need this information so that we know if to continue with college or to look for other forms of employment...

Like other students in the focus group, this student participant indicated that he was aware that there are only a few college bursaries available and it was difficult to even access those bursaries' – *'I do not know if I can even get one of those bursaries because so many students apply for them and they are just so few...'* It was important for the participants to get information about financial assistance because that information determines whether they would be able to stay in college. In other words, the availability of financial information and support is seen as an incentive for students as they make decisions about their academic future. This finding supports the conclusions of Reed and Hurd (2014) that financial support schemes should be considered more as tools for incentivizing enrolment.

Three of the teachers also believe that financial guidance is important for students as it gives them a sense of direction, and for those who do make use of that information and act on the information received, they see the benefits and the difference it makes to the academic levels of those students as expressed by one of the teachers:

...there is such a difference when a struggling student receives a bursary... there is a gradual improvement in the student's grades... it may not be much but you can actually see a behaviour change.... They become more responsive and show a lot more interest in their work... (TII8)

Another teacher added:

...there is financial information available for students... but I am not sure if they even know about it... Sometimes the information comes out too late and students are not even aware that it is there... (TII4)

The findings regarding access to financial guidance are important to participants as they perceive it to be necessary if they are to make decisions about their education. The findings support previous literature by Harrison et al.'s (2007) conclusions that students who have financial access (bursaries) perform relatively better than those who do not have such access. As shown by this research, the students who have such access indicate that it makes their academic lives much easier, and from the teachers' perspectives, students show some improvement in their attitude towards their learning.

The findings presented above support the conclusions of Bowes et al. (2007), that students are more focused when they have financial information and access. Notwithstanding, participants believed that the institution needs to provide adequate financial guidance, so that they would be more knowledgeable about finances as the majority of them come from backgrounds where such information is not forthcoming. In the current research, students felt that their commitment to academic achievement would be greatly enhanced if knowledge and access to economic capital (bursaries) were to be made available to them. This finding supports Davies and Elias' (2003) suggestions that the benefits of such knowledge would be better appreciated if it is communicated to students as it would aid them in making better decisions about their education.

5.3.3. Student Support Services

When student participants were asked to comment on their expectations of the learning environment, the majority of them indicated that a flexible learning environment would have positive benefits on their college learning experiences, and that a competitive and attractive environment would enhance their academic lives. The student participants highlighted institutional support services like the library (availability of resources and the opening and closing hours), Information Technology services (availability of internet/ Wi-Fi access) and availability of informal social learning spaces as important and necessary components that would enhance their learning and lead them to academic success (Kuh, 2003).

Conversations with participants reveal that students' expectations are high in terms of being able to utilise up-to-date library and information technology facilities to help improve their college learning experiences as was evident from the following responses:

...This is college... it has a library that I can actually use to do my assignments... but the facilities in there though, like the computers, need some work because they are slow... but I will use the library... it has the reading materials and books that I cannot afford to get. (SIG4)

Student SIG2 commented:

...it is important for the college to have up-to-date facilities like the IT lab and the library... this will definitely help us with our assignments... Most of us cannot afford reading material or even the computers to complete the assignments... so we have to use these facilities... but most of the time the facilities are not as good as expected... (SIG2)

Additionally, student SIG3 felt that because the institution does not have any designated study space for students he is forced to use the library facilities, which he feels inconveniences him as the operation times of the facility are not conducive for his mode of study:

...I am able to study better in the early evening... I would like to use the library at that time, but they open 9 until 6 and that is not convenient for me. I cannot study at home or during the day because of the many distractions so I usually have to find another location. (SIG3)

He also added that the technology services offered by the institution are extremely inefficient and do not meet his study needs:

...the computer facilities really need to get upgraded... technology is so slow... I don't pay my money to go through this slow process... it takes me so long just to get internet

access it is so frustrating... it is even more frustrating when I have assignments to give up... I can't do assignments because sites are blocked... this just seems unreal... (SIG3)

Most of the student participants were concerned about getting value for their money and expect the institution to provide them with quality technology services to help support their learning. Four of them indicated that as they are struggling to pay for college they expect college to give them what they pay for, as expressed by one of the student:

...it is already difficult for me to pay for college... I believe that college should provide me with that quality education after all we are paying for it... (SIG1)

The research reveals that technology drives students' academic and social interactions, making it extremely important that access to Information Technology services and resources are provided for effective student learning. Students further express disappointment at not having an informal social learning space where students could do collaborative learning with their peers as well as make friends outside of the classroom setting.

...My old school we had plenty of space to sit and do our work and organize ourselves. It is not like that here... we have to share computers... there is really no place for us to just sit and do our work using the computers... I thought it was different here... It makes it difficult especially when we also have no space to study at home. (SII5)

Social learning spaces are predesigned areas for student engagement. Student engagement is heightened when students use informal learning spaces (Matthews et al., 2011). These spaces foster participatory learning, enhance student interaction and provide a sense of belonging among students, suggesting a correlation between informal learning spaces and positive student engagement. The findings in this research, however, show that the institution does not provide adequate learning spaces that provide these experiences for students and this, according to students, disadvantages them even more as they cannot study at home, neither can they study within the college environment.

5.3.4. After School Programs - Remedial Education

After school programs were viewed by student participants as necessary for the development of their success, and they have the expectation that the educational institution would offer after school remedial education services to students who experience difficulties with their college courses. Remedial courses are designed to assist students in acquiring additional skills that would enhance their academic development. In the current research, remedial education was viewed as having the perceived value of enhancing achievement as stated by a participant in one of the focus groups:

...this is college and it is supposed to provide ways to help students like us do better... I am not very good at mathematics, but I passed it at secondary school... now I have to do it in here and I am having a difficult time... I thought that coming to college I would have the opportunity to do some extra classes so that I would be able to catch up with the better students... (IIS1)

Responding to the researcher's question as to why it was important to have remedial classes, participant IIS1 expressed that even though he passed mathematics at the secondary level examinations he was not achieving much success with it at college. He articulated that his failure in mathematics was impeding his progress as he could not pursue other mathematical related courses until he had passed the initial course '*I am having a very difficult time and unless I pass this one course I cannot do any other mathematical course*'.

The student participants indicated that there are many courses that they are either not familiar with, or simply have difficulty with, and believed that their chances of success would be better if the college provided them with additional help. They articulated that because they are underprepared for the demands of such courses, they need the additional assistance. This was articulated by another student participant within the same focus group, as follows:

...Some of us do not have the prerequisite knowledge to do some of the overly demanding courses... so we do need some additional courses for instance access mathematics and physics courses which could help us move from one course to the

next... but the college does not provide these remedial courses so we have to find outside help... (SIG5)

Another student commented as follows:

...I thought that the college would provide extra classes for students who were not so good to be able to help them... there are so many of us who are failing courses and we cannot afford to get outside lessons because they are so expensive... I really need the help but cannot afford it and this is affecting my studies very much. (IIS2)

The above conversations revealed that students see the need for additional instruction in the form of remedial classes to assist them in their learning. They have the expectation that, as a premier educational institution, the college is in the prime position to provide these additional learning opportunities that would not only allow underachieving students to catch up with their classmates, but would help them also to achieve their true potential. One of the student participants indicated: *'I find that a lot of the courses are extremely challenging... and I really need help for most of them... (IIS6)*

The majority of the student participants believed that these remedial classes would help them develop appropriate critical thinking skills that they would use to help improve their learning potential and improve their academic outcomes. Participants were aware of their level of unpreparedness which contributed to their level of underachievement and believe that the additional learning opportunities would assist them in achieving positive learning outcomes. This finding links to Howell's (2011) position that students placed in remedial classes have better chances of success in their courses and higher chances of graduating from college.

Responding to the researcher's question as to whether male students require remedial education at the tertiary level, teachers showed genuine concern and felt that underachieving students need remedial help with some college courses. They recommended that the institution provide remedial classes to students in areas of deficiency during the first year of college so that students would improve and accelerate their learning while being instructed by teachers specifically appointed to assist them. One of the teachers, ITI5 said:

...though students come to college with passing grades, they are challenged by the demands of the college courses... and as they struggle their performance suffers... many of these students need help with extra classes or some form of remedial instruction...

Four of the teachers commented that it was important to have specific teachers working with these students and providing them with that additional attention so that they would be able to focus and successfully complete these courses. This is a necessary component if students are to improve their academic outcomes as stated by one of the teachers:

... students need remedial instruction...however they also need specialized teachers to assist them as well... not anyone should be allowed to work with students who need such attention... (IT17)

However, not all teachers were enthusiastic about having remedial education at the tertiary level of education. One teacher in particular stated the following:

...the college learning environment should not be used as a place where students are assisted with basic or fundamental skills that they should have acquired in secondary education... remedial education has no place in tertiary education... if students want remedial classes they can get that privately... (IT18)

The teacher further added: *'when students come here they should have prior knowledge and not expect the institution to offer such classes... remedial classes are not for tertiary level students... at this level students need to engage more in what they are learning, and if they put in the effort they would not need those classes...(IT18)*

The findings showed that there are conflicting views as to the importance of remedial classes at institutions of higher learning. On the one hand remedial classes are seen to be important in helping students with less cultural capital and inadequate learning skills to improve their chances of success, which shows the link between student habitus and the use of language as espoused by Bourdieu (1992). On the other hand, it is argued that the idea of remedial classes not be entertained in tertiary education as at this level of education, students

should have sufficient knowledge to engage with college education, that is, the skills should have been learned prior to coming to college.

5.4. Summary

The focus of this chapter has been on students' expectations and perceptions of their learning environment, and how these expectations have an impact on their learning and academic outcomes. Evidence shows that students' prior learning significantly shapes their behaviours and attitude, as they enter higher education, and plays an important role in their engagement and participation in the college context. The majority of students matriculate into the college environment with sound academic qualifications, but as this research shows, they are unable to effectively transition into the learning environment because their prior learning experience does not adequately prepare them for the challenges and complexities of college education, resulting in student disengagement with learning and poor academic outcomes. This would suggest that students enter the learning environment with a deficit of skills, which explains their level of disengagement from the onset of their college experience (McCarthy & Kuh, 2006).

The research identified the absence of self-directed learning as a contributing factor in student disengagement and underachievement as it limits their ability to express their independence and acquire the necessary critical skills to support their learning experience. However, while self-directed learning is perceived as beneficial to students in terms of greater motivation toward their academic work and engagement with content, students were not mentally prepared to handle the level of autonomy entrusted on them in the new learning environment. These results align with evidence from previous literature (Murad et al., 2010) which argue that improved student knowledge base, attitudes and skills, are benefits of self-directed learning and are necessary for student engagement.

The present research has shown that students place high value on education, resulting in high expectations of their learning environment. Unfortunately, student expectations and

perceptions do not match the reality of the learning environment. When students' expectations of the learning environment are not met, the likelihood of social adjustment, college persistence, and good academic performance become difficult to obtain. This argument is relevant from the standpoint of this research as participants' expectations of teacher relationships and institutional support, perceived as critical to their learning, were not adequately met, affecting students' level of engagement to the extent that they experience poor academic outcomes.

CHAPTER SIX: SUMMARY, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this research was to explore underachievement of male students at a tertiary education institution in St. Lucia, and to examine the contributory factors giving rise to underachievement from the perspectives of male students themselves. The aim of the research was to gain an in-depth understanding of how male students perceive their educational environment and conceptualise themselves as learners. The discussions of participants lived experiences, presented emerging themes that describe underachieving student perceptions of their education and social environment. Bourdieu's theoretical framework of Habitus, Social and Cultural Capital and the literature review discussed in Chapter 2 were instrumental in providing a conceptual framework that facilitated an understanding of male academic underachievement in tertiary education, as well as assessing male students' expectations and experiences within a class structured learning environment that reproduces unequal relations and promotes disengagement and exclusion.

Participant responses to the research questions below provided an in-depth understanding of the issues and challenges experienced by underachieving male students in tertiary education:

1. What are the factors responsible for male academic underachievement at the tertiary level?
2. How do male students perceive their educational and social environments?
3. What factors do male students attribute their underachievement to?

The following section presents a summary which links the findings of the research to the three research questions outlined above, and further provides a discussion on the theoretical contributions that the research has made to existing empirical literature, limitations and the implications of the research; recommendations of the research for administrators, teachers and

other researchers interested in understanding the experiences of underachieving male students in tertiary education.

6.2. Summary of Results

This research focused on how underachieving male students conceptualize themselves as learners. It identified how individual agency, their responses, resistance and challenges within structure (social and educational) are linked to the opportunities and resources made available through economic, social and cultural capital, and are facilitated through the relationships within their home life and tertiary education. This intersectional link offered insights into how male student experiences influenced their academic achievement in tertiary education. The research generated findings that were both consistent with and contradictory to Bourdieu's theoretical framework of social and cultural capital and existing literature in the field. The following section presents a summary of the results linked to the three research questions presented in chapter one.

6.2.1. Research Question 1

- What are the factors responsible for male academic underachievement at tertiary level?

The results showed that there are many factors that students find to be responsible for academic underachievement in tertiary education. However, four salient factors are identified as significant to male academic underachievement. These factors are socioeconomic background, financial limitations, lack of motivation and student-teacher relationships, (teacher attitude and stereotype) and are discussed below.

Socioeconomic status

The results of this study show similarities in participants' views that their socioeconomic background contributes to their level of academic underachievement. Participants' identified low parental income and parental educational background as socioeconomic factors that have an impact on their ability to participate meaningfully in tertiary education. Participants express that parental low income in particular, influences their behaviour in the learning environment. They perceived parental low income to be an economic disadvantage that limits their attendance and participation in higher learning, as well as restricting the acquisition of resources that are necessary for use in tertiary learning. Parental low income impedes students' educational stability as increasingly students have to struggle to balance a poorly supported academic life with limited family financial support. Consequently, for the majority of the participants, the perceived economic disadvantage induces anxiety and stress (Jaynes, 2002) that affects their optimum performance levels.

Several participants express frustration at being at odds with their parents' negative expectations of them and with their own considerations of dropping out of college temporarily or exiting the educational environment completely. With these conflicting messages emerging within the home, it is evident that students' social capital networks do not work in their favour (Bourdieu, 1986).

Similarly, parental educational background is also seen as having an influence on students' academic achievement (Kapinga, 2014). Participants indicate that their parents lack the knowledge of the benefits of tertiary education; are not enthusiastic about the educational outcomes nor are they supportive of students' desire to attend tertiary education. Compounded further by the absence of parental involvement and emotional support students indicated that they feel less confident about their learning. In other words, male students lack the social and cultural capital necessary to positively enhance their educational success, which Bourdieu's theory (1986) envisages as indicative of low social class and class habitus. This indicates that underachieving male students from low socio economic households do not have the background or knowledge of tertiary education and their parents lack the cultural capital necessary to encourage male

students' participation in tertiary education. The lack of cultural capital impacts male students' views on the importance of education and how they behave in the learning environment.

While students from low socioeconomic backgrounds develop a negative habitus in their approach to education due to the lack of parental interaction and interest in their education, the results of this study show that some students from high socioeconomic backgrounds develop negative habitus as well and are not always predisposed to higher achievement levels despite their access to cultural, social and economic capital. This finding is at odds with the views presented by Bourdieu's (1986) social and cultural capital theory which suggests that the privilege of social and cultural capital available to students of higher socioeconomic status precludes them from developing a negative habitus to learning. Participants recognise that some families are well endowed with all forms of capital, but such families are unable to utilise that capital sufficiently to encourage male students' academic achievement. It is therefore argued that parental lack of involvement, in this case, was based on parents working hard in an effort to maintain their position within the social class and also maintain their level of economic stability.

While students perceive that the lack of parental involvement contributes to their academic underachievement, similar views by teachers are not forthcoming. Teachers perceive students as being capable of assuming responsibility for their own learning since they are considered mature and capable of independent thinking and learning. Where autonomy and independent learning is encouraged, parental involvement is not considered necessary. This finding is broadly in line with O'Bryan et al., (2006) research suggesting that parental involvement in student learning decreases as students' progress to higher levels of learning.

Participants expressed that parental support, encouragement, involvement and expectations influence their participation and engagement in tertiary education. They recognise the connection that exists between parental lack of involvement and being academically unsuccessful. The lack of involvement by parents and low academic outcomes in this research supports Altschul (2012) research emphasizing that in the absence of parental involvement, students show less interest in academic work, are demotivated, and experience high levels of stress which influences their ability to achieve academically.

Lack of finances

All the participants identify the lack of finances as a contributing factor to their levels of academic underachievement in tertiary education. Students are acutely aware of how inadequate capital resources (economic capital) limits their chances of academic success, and expressed that as a consequence of their socioeconomic status they experience conflict when making decisions about their academic future. The lack of economic capital affects their decisions about college engagement in a number of ways, including their decisions to; temporarily stay in college, leave College to help provide additional family support, or exit the learning environment entirely.

However many of the underachieving students in this research do not access financial assistance for fear of revealing their economic status, and for fear also of being stigmatised by their peers. In as much as financial assistance is important to students, the extent to which the assistance exposes students' social capital inequality is undesirable, making the assistance undesirable altogether. Students' cultural capital in terms of maintaining their network of friends and social identity weigh more than their desire to utilise funding as a means to academic achievement. This result contradicts Bourdieu's assertion of economic capital. According to Bourdieu (1986), economic capital is the basis through which all other materials and gains are accrued. Therefore, if underachieving students are to continue to participate and engage in the learning environment with the aim of improving their academic outcomes, it is imperative that they demonstrate the willingness to seek and access financial support.

Students abandon the opportunity of accessing financial aid in the form of loans as an alternative in the absence of other forms of economic capital (scholarships); as the risks involved in the inability to repay these loans is high and participants are unsure of employment security on completion of tertiary education. Participants do not have sufficient knowledge about accessing different forms of economic capital; thus it is not an option for them. They, however, recognise that not having sufficient access to finances challenges their ability to concentrate and commit to their learning which leads to academic underachievement.

Motivation

Findings from the current research suggest that male students lose interest in college academic activities after the realisation of a curriculum disconnect. The curriculum is seen to lack intellectual challenge and depth of content; it over-emphasises theory and shows little appreciation for practical experience and creativity of male students. Participants see no value in identifying with a curriculum that seems not to add value to their career aspirations. An inflexible, uninteresting and value-less curriculum decreases student motivation toward learning; such a curriculum decreases attentiveness and responses to classroom discussions. Participants expressed that the curriculum does not match their needs. As a consequence, students expend less effort in college-related activities, increasing their academic disengagement which eventually increases their low levels of academic performance. The research findings demonstrate that student academic success could be enhanced once students are motivated by elements within the learning environment such as an engaging curriculum.

Underachieving male students in this research are extrinsically motivated and hence less self-determined to participate in the learning environment. The majority of the students report that though they were motivated to come to college, they were not necessarily motivated academically. They expressed that their motivation to attend college is contingent on external factors, in this case, female students, and maintaining a social network of friends. While this motivation is counter-productive to students' academic success, as it encourages the development of social behaviour opposed to the achievement of their goals, it is seen to improve their male image and elevate their social position among their peers. This result supports Ryan and Deci's (2000) Self-determination theory conclusion that not all extrinsic motivation is undesirable and that it is possible to engage in an activity as a means to an end and not necessarily because the activity is intrinsically motivating.

Student-teacher relationships

Poor student-teacher relations are seen as a factor that contributes to male student academic underachievement in tertiary education. Students' experiences show that negative student-teacher relations challenge students' learning and position them in situations of conflict as they assess teachers' habits and behaviours towards them. Some students question the inability of teachers to understand their needs, citing teachers' lack of respect for their individuality as impeding their educational progress. While some participants find teachers to be emotionally invested in them, and have the cultural capital necessary to enhance student habitus, teachers' lack of commitment to students' growth within tertiary education impedes their learning as students do not understand the language of their teachers. This demonstrates a link between student habitus and teachers cultural capital , supporting Kandiko et al., (2013) research conclusions, acknowledging that students' negative experiences within the learning environment are precipitated by poor relationships with their teachers, especially those who are inattentive and invest less time with students.

Teacher unprofessionalism is instrumental in limiting student engagement in the learning environment. As teachers' cultural capital dictates the level of respect students have for them, teachers' casual attitude, teacher absenteeism and tardiness, communicate values that are incongruent to those of the teaching-learning environment which, unfortunately, creates conflicting value identifications for participants. Teacher unprofessionalism and inadequate pedagogical skills also demotivate student within the classroom as they are unable to initiate communication or dialogue with teachers whom they perceive lack character and are in their words 'classless'.

Students are critical of teachers' unethical behaviour and maintain that these unprofessional teachers lack the ability to institute positive changes in students' lives which they note contributes significantly to their underachievement. While Kandiko et al., (2013) research finds that positive staff attributes, practices and attitudes positively impact

educational outcomes, this current research shows that staff attitudes and practices have a negative impact on underachieving male students' academic outcomes.

Teacher stereotyping of male students is viewed as a contributing factor to student academic underachievement. Stereotypes of male students' learning capabilities by teachers make male students internalise that they are incapable of being successful, instilling a sense of self-doubt among them. Some participants report that teachers' low expectations and negative judgements about their ability increase their vulnerability and heighten their awareness about their educational limitations. Confronted by the subtle messages from teachers about their inability to improve their performance, male students' internalise themselves as failures, placing limits on how much they can do (Wout et al., 2008), and perform at levels consistent with teacher expectations. In other words, teacher expectations and negative judgements about students encourage the adaptation of the self-fulfilling prophecy that impedes students' learning thereby promoting underachievement.

6.2.2. Research Question 2

How do male students perceive their educational environment?

The results of this study indicate that participants perceive that the educational environment does not support their expectations of what tertiary education should be. Participants recognise that their prior educational experiences, coupled with a learning environment that lacks sufficient institutional guidance mechanisms, and insufficient financial guidance and support services, promotes an environment that does not support students' chances of upward mobility.

Students' prior educational experiences are found to negatively influence students' ability to participate in the college. The majority of the underachieving students struggle to fit into the new learning environment as a consequence of having insufficient or no information to make informed decisions.

Students' prior learning embodies a teacher-centred instruction which encourages students' lack of responsibility and autonomy for their own learning. In contrast, the emphasis in tertiary education is on the independent thinking, autonomy and self-directed learning necessary for student achievement. Institutional habitus promotes independent learning which means that students have increased workloads and additional responsibilities in relation to academic work. However, the difficulty of adjusting to those workloads is compounded by the lack of cultural capital from prior learning. Students' limited knowledge about the institutional habitus and culture, conditioned by the lack of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986), predisposes them to underachievement.

While some students had acquired a habitus from past experiences that conflicts with the institutional habitus, higher achieving students in this research were able to adjust their habitus long before entry into tertiary education, which allowed them to identify with the culture of the institution; consequently acquiring valuable capital used to enhance their chances of academic success. The inability to adjust successfully to the learning environment is contingent upon the amount of cultural capital available to students.

The lack of adequate institutional guidance encompassing orientation programs, financial guidance and student support services, serves as a barrier to students' upward mobility and affects their academic performance. The students established that orientation programs offering career guidance fail to give adequate information to allow them the opportunity to make informed decisions about choice of programmes and career development. This finding suggests that the inadequacies within institutional culture institute a change in student habitus, affecting their achievement levels. Academic support and advisement from teachers is inconsistent, leaving students poorly informed about self-management and career options, resulting in students' feelings of insecurity about their learning potential.

Students express the need for more knowledge about available financial options as the knowledge about the access to economic capital (bursary programs) is necessary to assist the majority of students from low socioeconomic backgrounds to make informed decisions about their future. These findings support Davies and Elias's (2003) conclusions that such knowledge

would be beneficial to student commitment in tertiary education. In line also with Bowes et al.'s (2004) conclusions on access to financial guidance, the current findings position that knowledge of, and access to, economic capital is viewed as an integral component in developing a student habitus, enhancing achievement within the learning environment.

Limited institutional support services impede student development and encourage student academic underachievement. Students did not receive adequate library and Information Technology support needed to effectively engage in the learning environment. Students perceive these services to be important to their academic development especially from the standpoint of their low socioeconomic status. This result exposes the inequalities within education as a consequence of the absence of student cultural capital. A conclusion to be drawn from this finding is that, underachieving students unable to access institutional support services for upward mobility are unfairly positioned within tertiary education. Those who have access to cultural capital would be in a position to navigate the education system and access additional services that promote upward mobility.

6.2.3. Research question 3:

What factors do male students attribute their underachievement to?

Male student participants perceive that their academic underachievement results from their lack of confidence in self and their inability to commit to the learning environment as reflected through their lack of time management and study skills. The lack of self-efficacy, produced when students' confidence is challenged by the fear of intellectual inferiority is perceived by underachieving students as a deterrent to their academic achievement. Jeopardised by social class, students lack confidence in their ability to do well in the learning environment, and concede that fears of intellectual inferiority are heightened when they have to interact with students from different socioeconomic backgrounds and learning abilities.

Consequently, they expend less effort and energy in the completion of academic related tasks. The conclusion drawn from this finding is that students' low self-efficacy alters their habitus leading to the intentional avoidance of academic tasks contributing to their levels of underachievement. This is comparable to findings in existing literature (Turner et.al, 2009) alluding to the positive relationship between self-efficacy and achievement, and differs mainly with Strelnek's (2005) findings that suggest no conclusive relationship between self-efficacy and male academic achievement.

Consistent with previous literature findings (Balduf, 2009; Baslanti, 2008), this research confirms that poor time-management and ineffective study habits contribute to student underachievement. Participants report that procrastination, the inability to prioritise and ineffective study-plan strategies are instrumental in initiating their underachievement. Underachieving male students do not have adequate knowledge on how to prepare effective study plans, nor are they aware of how to get advice and guidance on study-plan strategies. This could be attributed to insufficient guidance in prior education.

Students do not have the appropriate learning skill to aid their upward mobility and this limits their engagement with institutional culture. These results suggest that students need ongoing study and time management orientation programmes geared to developing their learning skills and improve their chances of academic success.

Students' association with peer groups influence student habitus to the extent that they develop self-confidence and increased levels of motivation to participate and improve their educational outcomes. In this research, peer group association is considered positive for underachieving students as these groups motivate a change in their habits to achieve successful academic outcomes. Participants' recognise that the peer influence and support they have runs contrary to the negative perceptions of peer group associations. Unlike the traditional peer groups that usually deter student achievement, associating with peer groups of similar backgrounds and educational limitations gives participants the support and encouragement needed to improve self-image and confidence, thus establishing a positive identity with

members of the peer groups. Consequently, these peer groups provide a positive cultural capital lacking in the home environment.

6.3. Theoretical Contributions of the Study

Within the St. Lucian context, there has been no research that has examined underachieving male students in tertiary education. This current research has explored the reasons for male academic underachievement in tertiary education in St. Lucia, giving male students a voice to share their experiences of underachievement and how they conceptualise themselves as learners. This research is therefore an original contribution to the field of academic underachievement in St. Lucia.

While there has been literature that has examined academic underachievement of students in tertiary/ higher education (Balduf, 2008), it is evident that very few studies within the Caribbean region have focused on academic underachievement of male students in tertiary education, emphasizing the use of Bourdieu's Social and cultural capital theory. This research supports the use of Bourdieu's social and cultural capital theory (1986) to explain how inequalities within education encourage academic underachievement in tertiary education. However it also provides additional knowledge that challenges some of Bourdieu's assertions of social and cultural capital.

As highlighted in this research, participants are acutely aware of their social class and internalise their experiences of underachievement as a result of their association in a class-based environment. They are also aware that access to cultural and social capital does not necessarily translate to higher academic performance. The study, therefore, adds new knowledge to the field by demonstrating that Bourdieu's social and cultural capital theory can be applied to the context of education in the Caribbean.

The current research provides evidence that, while accessing financial assistance was important for students, the extent to which that assistance exposed students' lack of economic

capital was undesirable. The study contributes to the academic work that has explored the relationship between financial constraints and student access and participation in tertiary education (Bower et al., 2014; Wray et al., 2014; Callender et al., 2009), by introducing evidence that shows how students conceptualise the acceptance of economic capital in tertiary education. It can be argued that this finding adds to existing knowledge on accessing financial support and educational achievement. .

Empirical literature on peer group association has shown that peer groups have the potential to mediate or moderate influence in students (Stanton-Salazar, 2004). While peer groups frequently promote oppositional school identity which encourages members to resist schooling practice (Gandara et al, 2004), this research has made a contribution to existing literature by showing how underachieving male students from low socioeconomic backgrounds seek support from other underachieving students that gives them a sense of belonging and provides the social capital that is absent from the home environment.

6.4. Limitations of the research

The study focus is on underachieving male students only; the students are characterised as having similar features, socioeconomic backgrounds and similar institutional culture. Their relative homogeneity is viewed as a limiting factor in this research as the views presented are reflective of only one population, that of male students. However, in order to achieve greater richness and depth of knowledge from the study, the study could have included other participants, for example, female students, who would have provided a different perspective on the nature and reasons for male academic underachievement in tertiary education.

A small sample size is used in the study, taken from only one of the five divisions at the institution under investigation. While it may be argued that qualitative methods may use a small sample to understand a problem or phenomenon, the confidence of this research would

have been greater if a larger representative sample were included from across the institution. This would, in essence, have provided additional richness to the research findings.

The research study relies solely on interviews as a means of evaluating participants' responses, posing the challenge as to whether participants' responses are honestly reflective of the participants' true feelings and normal behaviour. Within the focus groups, it seems as if participants' responses are dependent on what other members contributed during the discussions and do not necessarily reflect the true feelings of all individuals within the group. Some participants within the focus group seemed to be restrained in answering some of the questions posed by the researcher and simply agreed with the responses provided by the more assertive participants in the group. This observation suggests that some members of the group did not feel comfortable discussing some elements of underachievement with other participants present. It also suggested that some of the responses given by participants do not necessarily reflect the true feelings of all the individuals in the group, as some members simply agreed with what other member contributed. In other words, the group context had an impact on some participants and impacted the responses provided by group members.

Additionally, during the group interview process, participants would occasionally lose focus while discussing their experiences, thus creating generalisations of responses. When instances of generalisations happened, the researcher would redirect the discussion so that participants would focus on answering the questions posed. In this instance, the researcher remained fully focused on the research questions during the discussions (Moustakas, 1994) as this minimised the amount of unfocused information presented.

Given that the participants of the research are familiar with the researcher, it is possible that there could have been some element of bias from students. Participants would have been more inclined to provide responses that they thought the researcher wanted to hear, and not necessarily what was the true reflection of the situation. The research would probably have yielded more accurate information if the researcher had used a population of students that she did not teach.

6.5. Implications and Recommendations

The findings of this research as discussed above, has implications for the teaching learning process in tertiary education, processes for teachers, students as well as institutionally. As such a number of recommendations are provided that contribute to a better understanding of male student's academic underachievement in tertiary education as discussed below.

From a teaching-learning perspective, this research shows that underachieving male students have different social, economic and educational needs that challenge their ability to effectively engage in the learning environment. These challenges are reflected in students' inability to take responsibility for their own learning and the difficulties experienced as a result of their socioeconomic backgrounds (Altschul, 2012). These experiences present a challenge for teachers to be more aware, attentive and responsive to the needs of this particular group of students as these students respond to the learning environment differently.

Underachieving male students conceptualise their teachers as having the cultural capital necessary to assist in their educational development and improve their educational outcomes. Students expected that teachers recognise their learning abilities and respect their individual identity (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013). However, a greater element of trust would be needed between teachers and students in order to enhance the student-teacher relationship. This trust is established when there is recognition of positive teacher attitudes towards the limitations of underachieving students, valuing and acknowledging student contributions and being interested and mindful of students' wellbeing.

Recommendation - teachers in this regard would need to create a learning environment that considers students' limitations and values their contributions. Teachers therefore need to revise the teaching strategies used in the learning environment, for instance using a more student-centered approach to teaching and learning which allows for the development of closer teacher-student trust. Through this approach, teachers work closely with students and are able to understand who they are and the challenges that they face, individually and as a group.

In an attempt to understand how to support underachieving students, both academically and emotionally, teachers need to improve their communication and interpersonal skills through periodic training and staff professional development programmes in order to understand student behaviour and background. This would make it harder for teachers to misunderstand the actions of students; instead they would recognise and take into account the common characteristics that male students have within the learning environment

While the findings show that the students appreciated teachers' vast content knowledge, they desire teachers who are enthusiastic and passionate about the courses they are teaching (Kandiko and Mawer, 2013), and they also want teachers who could help them understand the content and could support their academic needs.

Recommendation - The institution consider providing teaching support to teachers in the form of reduced workloads to allow them contact time to work with students needing additional academic support. Additional academic support would help underachieving students meet required programme standards and improve their grade point average. Additionally, the institution needs to support teachers by allocating additional time for teachers to engage in pedagogy research to enhance and improve teacher competency.

Literature has shown that parental involvement and support provide the human capital necessary for the academic success of the student (Altschul, 2012). However parental lack of involvement and participation in male students' academic pursuits is perceived to affect male students' levels of success in tertiary education. Findings suggest that the lack of parental involvement and support has a negative effect on male student academic achievement. Participants perceive the need for greater parental involvement, as parental support and acknowledgement defined their level of participation in tertiary education.

Recommendation - The learning institution needs to develop programmes that would encourage collaborative participation between parents, teachers and students in an effort to institute awareness in parents about the benefits of tertiary education and the importance of their support to the positive growth and development of male students.

The curriculum is seen as a challenge for students as it does not engage their creativity, offers little opportunity for practical experience, is not relevant and does not match student or industry needs. A disconnect exists between the academic curriculum and the needs of the students, and this has an impact not only on how students approach learning but also how they approach the workforce. The limitations of the curriculum have implications as to how students invest in their education. If the curriculum were perceived as engaging, students' participation would be higher; there would be the encouragement to develop better skills and consequently the development of a skilled and educated workforce.

The challenges of the curriculum experienced by male students, in this research, suggest that significant parts of the curriculum overemphasized theoretical content and give little attention to any practical components which frustrated and demotivated them. Students' frustration with the inadequate curriculum encourages student disengagement with learning, and increases the level of academic underachievement. Because of the high level of student disengagement with the curriculum content, teachers and college education officials should be concerned with redefining the curriculum to reflect more on learner-centred activities that are flexible, practical, creative and motivating for male students, in other words, redefining the curriculum to reflect a pedagogy that is relevant to students' lives, and promotes hands-on learning.

Recommendation – teachers engage in periodic programme review of courses within the existing curriculum to ensure that practical components of the courses are being implemented and meet the standards of work based programs. This would increase student motivation and interest in what they are learning and help them develop skills necessary for upward mobility.

Financial guidance and access to financial aid are important factors that help students make decisions about their careers and academic success. Participants express that the lack of institutional guidance mechanisms such as these, creates barriers to continued participation and engagement in learning. As suggested in chapter 2, research findings suggest, students who had ample knowledge about the overall cost of financing their education were more likely

to continue in higher education (Davies and Elias, 2003). This finding suggests that participants have difficulty accessing financial information as well as accessing finances altogether, which made participants contemplate their decision to participation in tertiary education. The challenge presented for college administrators is identifying mechanisms that would allow students to access such knowledge continuously and efficiently in an effort to limit student disengagement and participation in learning and raise their levels of academic achievement.

Recommendation – institutional support service such as academic orientations and advisory programmes provide adequate information and guidance in relation to financial access and alternative avenues to access such information in order to assist student decision making processes. Financial awareness programmes need to be made available to students so that students understand the benefits of accessing finances to aid their educational investment. The availability of information regarding other financial assistance programmes would give students greater option choices, develop a level of self-worth and minimise the dropout or non-attendance of male students in tertiary education.

Remedial programmes are perceived by participants as necessary for improved academic achievement. Participants expressed that in the absence of remedial programs it is difficult for them to reach their full potential as they continuously underperform in major pre-requisite courses. While contradicting views arise about the implementation of remedial education programmes in tertiary education, it is considered a necessary addition to the already existing curriculum if students are to improve their academic outcomes. The implication is that educational officials in an effort to increase student completion rates in programme courses should consider formulating plans and strategies to include remedial education programmes in the curriculum in an effort to positively motivate and influence male students' participation in tertiary education.

Students' expectations of tertiary education are viewed as incongruent with institutional expectations (Kreig, 2013), making the transition from secondary education to tertiary education challenging. The deficiency of institutional support for students, in terms of academic advisement, raises concerns as students depend on these support mechanisms to make

decisions about their academic futures. This solidifies the need for greater collaboration between secondary and tertiary education in order that there is a transfer of knowledge and information about tertiary education expectations. This would create a smoother transition for students as they become better prepared and more knowledgeable about what to expect of tertiary education.

Recommendation - In order to support ease of transition into tertiary education and to assist students decision making processes academic support services such as academic advisement be ongoing throughout students' college lives, as this would give students the opportunity to utilise such services regularly, and in the process develop the skills and knowledge necessary to improve their academic outcomes.

6.6. Recommendations for future research

The findings of this research have contributed towards a deeper and better understanding of the factors that contribute to male academic underachievement in tertiary education. Building on these findings, the researcher recommends a comparative study examining both male and female underachieving students to determine their perceptions of academic underachievement. Underachieving female students may experience the educational and social environment differently from underachieving male students. Such a study could provide alternative knowledge and additional information on how to assist underachieving students generally in tertiary education.

Parental involvement in students' tertiary level pursuits in this research is seen as contradictory to what tertiary education embodies, that is developing student autonomy and responsibility for self. It would be useful for future studies to examine the effects of parental involvement in student academic lives in tertiary level institutions, from the perspectives of both achieving and underachieving students, and what impact parental involvement would have on student motivation in tertiary education.

A study examining underachieving male students' attitudes towards education and how these attitudes affect academic outcomes could also be conducted. Such a study could provide information on what motivates male students in the learning environment. Significantly, a research study aimed at examining teacher sensitivity to the needs of male students at tertiary level could also be considered for future research. At the level of tertiary education, the role of the teacher is to facilitate learning; some of the participants indicated that their instructors could not relate to them or address their feelings in an effort to motivate student academic success through the learning process that they facilitate. Such a study could also provide information on the different strategies that teachers could use while engaging underachieving students. This would allow teachers to develop pedagogical strategies, structures and activities that could help underachieving male students improve their academic outcomes.

All the participants indicated that they come from the lower socioeconomic environment where financial constraints are of great concern. It would be of interest to conduct research on male participants from higher socioeconomic environments to determine the impact that class has on student attitudes and motivation.

6.7. Conclusion

The current research study sought to determine factors that contribute to students' academic underachievement in tertiary education. This was achieved using Bourdieu's Social and Cultural capital concept (1989) as the theoretical framework to examine and conceptualise the experiences of underachieving male students. The findings show that, within the context of education in St. Lucia, the education system encourages the reproduction of social class and alienates those who possess limited social, cultural and economic capital. For underachieving male students, socioeconomic status, financial limitations, lack of motivation, student-teacher relationships, lack of institutional guidance and support have created obstacles that limit their ability for upward mobility. These factors facilitate the reproduction of social class which aligns with Bourdieu's (1989) social and cultural capital concept.

Within the learning environment, teachers play a significant part in the lives of students' engagement and participation in tertiary education as they are able to establish positive social and academic interactions with the students that they teach and mentor. It is, therefore, imperative that a relationship of trust between students and teachers be developed and maintained so as to allow for better recognition and treatment of student needs.

While it may seem that, at the level of tertiary education, students have developed the maturity to cope with academic pressures and take responsibility for their learning, this research has shown that male students need intervention strategies that cater to their individual needs, in particular, strategies directed at developing a student-centred curriculum catering to the diverse and creative interests of these young men. This research has shown that these young men are interested in learning and have the aspirations of achieving upward mobility but are challenged by the absence of adequate social, cultural and economic capital. Intervention methods, therefore, need to focus on how these forms of capital can be manipulated to function in favour of underachieving students.

Having completed this research, the researcher has developed a greater understanding and appreciation of the fear and uncertainty that underachieving students experience in tertiary education, as a result of their inability to adequately access social, cultural and economic capital. The knowledge gained from this research can be used to develop new intervention methods that take into consideration the needs of male students rather than the needs of education policy makers and academic administrators. This does not mean that existing strategies are not effective. Existing strategies have been developed to assist underachieving students within the primary and secondary levels of education; however strategies also need to be formulated for tertiary and higher education underachieving learners.

APPENDIX

APPENDIX A – STUDENT CONSENT FORM

STUDENT CONSENT FORM

My name is Maria Mbinda-Lashley, and I am a Doctoral student at the University of Leicester, England. I am conducting research on Male Underachievement in St. Lucia, and would like you to participate in this research as part of a student focus group. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of male students as it relates to underachievement and the learning environment.

Your participation in this research will consist of an interview lasting approximately thirty minutes. You will be asked a series of questions about your life and learning experiences. If you feel uncomfortable with the questioning and discussion process, you may choose not to participate. At any time during the discussion, you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the research. There is no penalty for discontinuing participation. This interview and discussion will be audio-recorded for later analysis.

This research poses little to no risk to you. On the audio-recorded interview, you will not be identified by name. Any identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All of your information interview and discussion responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the research supervisor. I will do my best to ensure that confidentiality. You may choose to leave the study at any time, and may also request that any data collected from you not be used in the research.

By signing below, you agree that you have read and understood the above information and would be interested in participating in this study.

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Your name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your signature _____ Date _____

Signature of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

Printed name of person obtaining consent _____ Date _____

APPENDIX B – TEACHER CONSENT FORM

TEACHER CONCENT FORM

My name is Maria Mbinda- Lashley, and I am a Doctoral student at the University of Leicester England. I am conducting research on Male Underachievement in St Lucia. The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of the experiences of male students as it relates to underachievement and the learning environment.

As an individual participant you are invited to attend an interview lasting approximately thirty minutes. You will be asked a series of questions concerning your experiences within the teaching and learning environment with special emphasis on male students. If you feel uncomfortable with the questioning and discussion process, you may choose not to participate. At any time during the discussion you may notify the researcher that you would like to stop the interview and your participation in the research. This interview and discussion will be tape recorded for later analysis.

This research poses little to no risk to you. The interview will be audio recorded; however, your name and identifying information will not be associated with any part of the written report of the research. All of your information, interview and discussion responses will be kept confidential. The researcher will not share your individual responses with anyone other than the research supervisor. I will do my best to ensure that level of confidentiality. You may choose to leave the study at any time, and may also request that any data collected from you not be used in the research.

By signing below you agree that you have read and understood the above information, and would be interested in participating in this study.

I have read the above information, and have received answers to any questions I asked. I consent to take part in the study.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

Your Name (printed) _____

In addition to agreeing to participate, I also consent to having the interview tape-recorded.

Your Signature _____ Date _____

APPENDIX C – SAMPLE NVIVO CODING

Study habits student
Reference 1 - 0.75% Coverage I am not getting good grades and this is because I have not been putting the effort into my work.
Reference 2 - 0.71% Coverage
Meeting new friends and having so much freedom I think is why I am not doing well in school.
Reference 3 - 0.25% Coverage
I study but I am just distracted.
Reference 4 - 1.53% Co
This means that we have to do these courses over again and that in itself is challenging. It is not that we cannot do the courses but they are so many and coping with all in one semester is difficult.
Reference 5 - 2.42% Coverage
When I go home I have to deal with my siblings and my mother and I really do not have the time to study as much as I want to so I really do not prepare for school the next day so when I come to college the following day it's like I am hearing the stuff taught in class as new even though it was taught a few days ago.
<Internals\\TAPE 12-> - § 1 reference coded [1.63% Coverage]
Reference 1 - 1.63% Coverage
I probably waste time unlike a lot of guys in this school I like to procrastinate a lot to do something and only on the last day you'll see them copy or try to give up something.
Reference 1 - 2.68% Coverage
Well to be honest with you miss, I try to study any chance I get, but that is difficult when I am at school. But when I go home I have time for me and so I have a good study environment. My parents are supportive and they always want to know what I did at school and what homework I have to do. It might look like they are overbearing parents but I understand their concern and I am just happy to have them inquire about my college life. Not many other students can tell you that their parents want to know what they are doing in school.

1. Do you believe that having a college education is important?

- If yes why? Why not?
- In your opinion is college education different from your high school education?
- If yes what makes it different? If not explain its similarities
- How would you describe your previous academic performance (high school performance)?
- How is it different from your current academic performance?
- In your opinion, what do you consider as the reasons for your current performance level?
- There is much talk about underachievement.
- What does underachievement mean to you?
- What do you think other persons mean by the term underachievement?

2. Educational institutions have continuously reported that male students perform poorly in most subject areas.

- Do you think this is true? If true why? Why not?
- What subject areas do you perform well at?
- What are the reasons for this positive or negative performance in these subject areas?

3. In your opinion what are some of the challenges you face as students attending tertiary education

- Why do you consider them as challenges?
- Do you believe that you can overcome these challenges?

<p>4. In your opinion do you believe that the school environment can influence your behavior ie how you react to teachers and other students?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How you react to learning? Yes, why, / why not? • Do you believe that teachers help shape the behavior of their students in the classroom? If yes explain how? • Which teacher has made an impact on your life... male teachers or female teachers? In what way have they impact your life?
<p>5. College is referred to as your 'second home'.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are some of the things you like or dislike school? Explain your answer • What motivates you about college? • What would make college more interesting for you?
<p>6. How important is it to do well at school?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Important/ not important. Explain. • Is there anything that may stop you from learning at college? Yes/no explain. • . Is there something that you could do to help you learn better at college? • Is there something that the college can do to help you learn better?
<p>7. Are you a part of any social groups at college?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Do you think that being a member of these groups has helped your achievement? Yes. How? No... Why not?
<p>8. A big part of you learning is through the curriculum?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion does the current college curriculum work for you? • If yes please explain • If no please explain. • In your opinion how can the curriculum be improved if it does not work for you?

<p>9. Describe some of your study habits.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In your opinion do you believe that these study habits contribute to your level of achievement? Explain • Do you believe that changing some of the study habits will help improve your level of performance? Explain
<p>10. How do you think teachers help you learn in college?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What are the different ways teachers help students learn • In your opinion do you think that teachers teach male and female student differently? Explain your answer • Which teacher do you think motivates or demotivates you the most? Is this teacher male or female • What kind of relationships do you have with your teachers? Positive or Negative? • What makes those relationships positive/ negative?
<p>11. In your opinion what are some of the issues or challenges you face as a student at this institution?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Are there any areas that you may want changed? If yes why..... If no why not • Can you suggest any solutions to these issues • Can you identify any other areas of concern with regard to student/teacher relationships
<p>12. As students at the institution are there any issues that you feel affect the way you learn?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What do you enjoy most about your learning environment? • In your opinion are there things that you would like the learning environment to change?

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