

ABSTRACT

Through the Eyes of Boys: Male Academic Underachievement in Secondary Schools- a Case Study in Victoria District, Trinidad and Tobago

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My experience as a teacher along with my exposure to information about male academic underachievement had convinced me that this phenomenon is a reality. I saw the many negative social implications of that reality one of which is males' reduced ability to earn a livelihood. This, in turn, may encourage some men to embrace a career in criminal activities.

The researched literature, while not being unanimous about some issues pertaining to male academic underachievement, suggests that the phenomenon exists. Suggested explanations for its existence are the feminization of education where more females are engaged in education today than in the past; male privileging developed through differences in the socialization of boys and girls and hypermasculinity where under particular circumstances, some males exaggerate behaviours which are perceived to be manly but which may devalue formal education as a manly pursuit. However, some of the surveyed literature suggest that males are not so much underachieving as under-participating in education. Furthermore, in spite of males' self-limitation in education there exists a gender gap in their favour in the labour market.

The methodology of this study entailed the examination of official educational statistics and data from focus group discussions. I conducted the focus group discussions among male students of five secondary schools in County Victoria, Trinidad to determine what boys' notions about male academic underachievement were. They conceded that male academic underachievement is a reality. I also solicited the boys' views on how male academic achievement may be improved and they suggested that the home and the school should play a central role in reversing the negative trend in boys' academic achievement.

Keywords: Melvin C. Julien; feminization; gender gap; hypermasculinity; male academic underachievement; male privileging.