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ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT IN MALE SECONDARY STUDENTS

A thesis in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Psychology
Massey University

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2001

Acknowledgements

Many people have contributed and helped with this thesis, and without them, it would never have been completed. Firstly, thanks to my supervisor, Dr Richard Fletcher, who was prepared to take me on board. Your enthusiasm and faith helped keep the research project moving to its completion.

I would also like to acknowledge the participating schools who were kind enough to allow their students to take time out from class to take part in this research. I appreciate the time and help given to me from the staff who I dealt with from these schools. I am also very grateful to the students who participated in the research and wish you all well for your futures.

Working on a thesis can be both isolating and frustrating, so thanks to my friends for your support and encouragement, particularly Katherine, my long time study partner and close friend, for your sympathy and understanding.

My family has been incredibly encouraging and supportive of me also, especially my sister Jackie. Their total unwavering faith in me has been a lifeline over this last year. Above all, I would like to thank my two children Michael and Monique. You have both been inspirational and very patient. I hope this long journey will benefit us all in future years.

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Abstract

This study explored academic underachievement of fourth form boys in male secondary schools within the Auckland area. There were two aspects to this study; firstly, to identify students who are underachieving relative to their abilities and secondly, to explore possible psychological differences between underachievers and non-underachievers. An underachiever for the purpose of this study is a student who is achieving lower grades than expected in accordance with his abilities (McCall, Evahn & Kratzer, 1992).

598 of the 770 students enrolled in the participating schools had the necessary data for regression analyses to identify underachievers. Of the 598 students with valid data, 315 consented to participate in the questionnaire. The sample for this study comprised 315 fourth form boys. A discrepancy model using regression analysis was carried out on the 315 students to identify underachievers within the schools. 82 students were identified as underachievers using this method, which resulted in 13.9% of the sample being defined as underachievers. In addition, a self-report questionnaire was administered to the 770 students. The questionnaire measured six psychological dimensions that have been identified in previous research to be related to academic achievement. The responses of the underachievers and non-underachievers were compared to ascertain whether these two groups differ on the psychological dimensions measured. These psychological constructs measured in the questionnaire included study strategies (cognitive/self-regulation, persistence/effort, and disorganisation), social support, self-efficacy, test anxiety, intrinsic motivation/interest in school subjects, and outcome expectancies. There was a significant mean difference between non-underachievers and underachievers on the disorganisation scale. This finding suggests that underachievers had more disorganised study habits than their non-underachieving comparison group. There were also significant mean differences between underachievers and non-underachievers for intrinsic value in English and science. These findings suggested that underachievers were more intrinsically motivated in English than their non-underachieving comparison group, but less intrinsically motivated in Science.