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## Exploring boys' agencies towards higher education: The case of urban Jamaica

### Abstract:

This chapter looks at Jamaican boys' aspirations towards higher education in relation to their personal experiences and histories shaped by social structures and groups within their educational field. It engages with Bourdieu's theory of practice to explore boys' personal agencies towards higher education through systems of power relations within their socio-cultural contexts. Boys are grossly underrepresented in higher educational institutions in Jamaica and across the English-speaking Caribbean. The sociological and historical explanations include a gendered educational system favored towards girls, crime and Black male-hegemony. At the risk of overgeneralization, these explanations - though relevant - tend to place boys in a 'victim' mode, as agents without voices. This outlook is explored through a qualitative study analyzing the narratives of approximately 64 participants affiliated with two schools in urban Jamaica. The findings present boys as both active citizens of their own agencies and 'victims' of relations of power within wider social structures.

## **Introduction**

Boys are under-represented in higher education (HE) institutions across the English speaking Caribbean (CCYD, 2010; Jha & Kelleher, 2006; MOEYC, 2004). This is particularly the case in Jamaica where girls outnumber boys at a ratio of two to one. According to the Jamaican government, boys' failure to progress through the school system begins from year nine where many drop out and join dangerous gangs in the inner-cities (GOJ, 2009b; GOJ, 2009b). This create a massive burden on the Jamaican society as a whole where as early as 1996, nearly eight out of every ten arrests made by the police were presumably committed by males under the age of thirty (Chevannes, 2002). More recently in 2005, the Jamaica Constabulary Force reported Jamaica murder rate a high 56 per 100,000 residents (UNODC, 2007). The National Security policy of Jamaica (2013), states explicitly that crime, violence and corruption are now the foremost threats to the overall economic welfare of the country. According to the policy, within the last decade, Jamaica has fallen 51 places in the World ranking, one of the most rapid decline in the world. This level of loss is normally equivalent to a profound catastrophic disaster, however, in the case of Jamaica, economic development is retarded by crime and the fear of crime. The result is an investment in programs and strategies to encourage boys to complete secondary school and possible progress in to higher or further education. The core objective is to keep boys off the street and for them to view education as a means of social mobility. However, *what are the root causes of their under-representation in the first place, and what are the nature of their aspirations towards HE? Overall, what is the role of their personal agencies within the dynamic structure between home, school, community, culture and policies?*

Educational aspiration is operationalized in this chapter as a desire and an intention towards higher education (Stockfelt, 2015). The term is conceptualized in relation to the literature and the narratives of the participants' within the Jamaican/research context. I explored these questions in relation to an ethnographic case-study conducted across two schools in urban, Jamaica. Theoretically, Bourdieu's theory of practice, along with the narratives of the boys themselves, were used to discuss the nature of boys' educational aspirations (EA) and the role of agency in exercising this. The chapter begins with an outline of the background literature used to position and clarify the root of the problem. Bourdieu's theory of practice is then introduced briefly as the theoretical framework but placed within context of the Jamaican situation. The ethnographic approach is described and justified followed by a discussion of the findings rooted in the conceptual and theoretical framework.

### **Boys under-representation in HE**

Boys' underrepresentation is not unique to the Jamaican context but a reflection of a gendered social deviance that seems to be rapidly expanding across various countries globally (EFA, 2009). Within the Caribbean, the literature attributes this to a variety of historical, cultural, economic and sociological factors. Overall, there seem to be a consensus that boys' underrepresentation is directly a result of their underachievement at the end of secondary schooling. Underachievement, is defined in terms of boys' limited success in the Caribbean Secondary Examination Certificate (CSEC), based on Caribbean-wide standardized examinations taken at the end of Secondary school across almost all subject areas. Boys tend to underachieve with respect to less passes at levels A-C across most subject areas. The Ministry of Education (MOE) 2013 results showed that only 37% of those with five or more subjects at passes A-C were boys (GOJ, 2013). This is the standard for matriculating into HE, with only 3,878 males achieving that standard to 7,373 females in 2013 (GOJ, 2013). With this said, boys in Jamaica are definitely not marginalized as they assume many leadership posts across social systems. According to Chevannes (2002), regardless of this educational discrepancy, males are usually in roles of power in the homes, schools, churches and political institutions. For Chevannes, males' underachievement and subsequent underrepresentation is a case of under-participation. This is defined as lower enrolment, lower attendance rates and higher dropouts at mid to upper level of secondary schooling (Chevannes, 1999, 2002). This puts the focus more on personal agency – in relation to other factors – as oppose to ability. Chevannes (1999, 2002) thesis of male under-participation being a moderator for their under-representation has been supported

by a lot of research in the literature (CCYD, 2010; EFA, 2009; Evans, 2000; MOEYC, The Development of Education: National Report of Jamaica, 2004; Parry, 1996; UNODC, 2007). The Global Monitoring report (EFA, 2009), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) Commission on Youth Development (CCYD) report (CCYD, 2010), and the United Nation Economic Commission for Latin American and the Caribbean (UNECLAC, 2010) all recognize this as a major problem that results in their eventual dropping out of the school system.

Historically, some research highlights boys' under-representation as being linked to a gendered view of formal education which has its roots in slavery. According to Beckles (1996), males in Jamaica has undergone a form of hegemony during slavery, where their masculinity was negated to an "otherness" not akin to power or glory (Beckles, 1996; Parry, 1996). Slavery existed for over two-hundred years in the Caribbean. During that period, White slave masters had a right to abuse Black men in whatever capacity they chose fit. This was usually undertaken in a brutal manner in a bid to dominate and reduce any possibility of rebellion. According to Beckles (1996), the narratives in the literature of White slave owners, showed how effeminate characteristics were transferred to the Black men through a variety of means. These include denying them their roles as fathers and husbands by taking/owning their wives and children. According to Johnson (1996), such practices help to establish a distinct gender divide in attitudes, with Black men rejecting any behavior seen as 'feminine' amongst themselves. Unfortunately, within a modern context, this sometimes included excelling at formal or traditional schooling. Some sociologists perceive this gender-based view of formal schooling as stemming from cultural practices beginning from primary socialization. Miller (1991; 1992) pioneered the notion of male marginalization through a dominant colonial power impacting on the Jamaican subculture. However, such notion has to be visited carefully as it has the potential of vilifying Black girls and further emasculating Black boys by removing their personal agencies.

Other sociologists takes a different approach in explaining boys apparent lack of progress into HE, that is, boys' are under-participating in schools which leads to their underachievement at the end of secondary schooling and henceforth underrepresentation in HE. According to the literature (Chevannes, 2002; Bailey, 2003; Evans, 2000; Figueroa, 2000; Parry, 1996) the Jamaican culture prepares girls for the culture of schooling which at the same time disadvantage boys. This is a socially constructed 'feminized' version where girls co-exist as

passive learners and boys are unable to fit in. According to Figueroa (2000), Jamaican males are actually more privileged and are socialized to be dominant, strong and 'hard'. They are expected to be self-sufficient and the provider in their family. For many, schooling is not viewed as means to fulfil this obligation as it is not necessary to increase their earning power. On the other-hand, this constructed image sees 'femaleness' as sensitive, submissive and needing protection. This view also sees female upward mobility as tied to their educational achievements and provides a sense of security. Chevannes (2005) theorized this aspect of the culture as stemming from the historical dimension which has infiltrated the home, school and society. According to Brown and Chevannes (1998) this gendered aspect of the culture results in parents encouraging more formalized education for girls but practical career-oriented ones for boys. By the time children begin schooling, boys value formal education much less. Brown and Chevannes (1998) view these cultural ideas as continuing within the schools, with boys receiving harsher punishments because of their attitudes to school, resulting in them fulfilling the expectation of being indisciplined and tough. This attitude is adopted by peer culture as well, with positive attitudes to formal schooling viewed sometimes as feminine. Such behavior may include the practice of Jamaican English versus the Jamaican Creole, spending time at home doing homework, conforming to school rules and getting high grades in traditional non-vocational subjects (Bailey, 2003; Brown & Chevannes, 1998; Chevannes, 1999, 2002; Evans, 2000; Figueroa, 2000; Miller, 1991). The result is a form of "feminization" of high academic performance that seems to reflect a marginalization that is self-inflicted.

In the literature, the historical and cultural dimension of boys' under-participation in Jamaica has one thing in common, a consensus tied to a search and a need for economic independence. This might seem contrary since HE is seen as an important factor in development, especially for many low-mid-income countries like Jamaica. However, HE does not necessarily translate to economic independence for many in low income countries, with a high level of unemployment amongst graduates. In addition, youths (ages 14-25) makes up 30% of the unemployed population. According to the GOJ (2009, 2009b) of the youth population, 26.2% of the males are illiterate, in comparison to only 7.9% of the females. Of those who dropped out of secondary school, 25% has below grade 9 level of education. The Jamaican government theorized that for many boys from low-income background in the inner-city, crime is seen as a way out of poverty. According to Chevannes (2002), as early as 1996, nearly eight out of every ten arrests made by the police were presumably committed by males under the age of thirty. The United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) (2007) through multivariate

regression analysis identified a significant correlation between higher crime rate and lower education levels amongst large numbers of young men in Jamaica, Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago; highlighting the connection between gender, low-level of education and crime. Overall, boys are not transitioning into HE which is a problem for the Jamaican government as the future of the country depends a lot on its youth population.

### **The Role of Policy**

At the level of policy, the Jamaican government view this underrepresentation as impacting on the development of the country as a whole. Many studies have established a strong connection between education and development (Cutler, Deaton, & Lleras-Muney, 2006; Hanushek & Woßmann, 2007; Jamison, Jamison, & Hanushek, 2007; Namsuk & Serra-Garcia, 2010; Preston, 2007). This connection is based on the idea that investing in education will lead to economic growth as measured by the Gross Domestic Product (GDP). In this manner, education is seen as a human capital that will boost development. The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) white paper “Education: the way upward” that was tabled in parliament in 2001 stated:

*“the building of human and social capital represents our best hope for economic growth and social peace, the major requirements for an improved and sustainable quality of life”.*

It also stated in an earlier format that:

*“this Green Paper 2000 represents a commitment of the Government of Jamaica to engage our people in the strongest possible partnership for development through education and training” (MOEYC, 2001).*

This focus in the policy is proposed to be met through an investment in education and skills that matches the current global trend and boost Jamaica’s competitiveness on the global market. Overall, the policy emphasizes education as a human capital that is critical for Jamaica’s development (GOJ, 2009; 2009b). This part played by education in relation to economic growth is still evident approximately ten years later, as presented in the new National Development Plan “Vision 2030 Jamaica”, emphasizing a move away from “*a lower form of capital*” based on Jamaica’s natural endowment from the soil and nature, to “*higher forms of capital*” including “*human*” and “*knowledge*”. Amongst its many objectives, Vision 2030 aspires towards “*world-class education and training*” with a minimum requirement that pupils should successfully complete secondary schooling with a proficiency in English Language, mathematics, Information technology (IT), a science, foreign language and a vocational subject (GOJ, 2009). This also includes enhancing tertiary level education to establish an

“*innovative*” and “*knowledge-based*” society. This focus on human capital and knowledge in Jamaica is very much tied into the human capital theory propagated by aid/loan institutions like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) through their establishment of finance driven reforms. These reforms included shifting public spending from higher to lower levels of education and opening the way for the private sector to fund secondary and HE (Mundy, 2005). This means that parents in Jamaica share the cost of funding education with the government at the secondary level of schooling and to a much greater level at the tertiary. Even with Jamaica’s recent middle-income status, this is still problematic as the larger part of the population belongs to the working class. Shifting of public spending away from secondary and tertiary levels of education increase social and economic inequalities based on levels of capitals that families have at their disposal to finance education.

### **Bourdieu Structure and Agency**

A key theory utilized in this chapter is that of the French sociologist/anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu. Central to his theory is the notion of agency and structure and the connection between them. According to Bourdieu (1992), agency is the capability to engage in social action while structure consists of both material and symbolic contents co-created by us as agents. Bourdieu (1992) views structure as existing when social practice becomes institutionalized into viable system of power through which and within which agency becomes regulated. However, both agency and structure is united through practice. Practice is action or behavior on the part of agents which occurs consciously or unconsciously, based on habits or experiences, this Bourdieu (1977) defines as “*doxa*”. This concept is used to explain a taken for granted belief, one that is seen as true by a society or a culture. Bourdieu perceives practice as being informed by agency, at the same time, this is limited by the objective structures in place within that culture. Understanding the practice behind a society or culture from such a framework includes a deeper understanding of three key concepts: field, habitus and capital. According to Bourdieu (1977), habitus are dispositions created within deterministic social structures, i.e., beliefs that becomes ‘habituated’ through primary and secondary socialization. Bourdieu defines habitus as:

*‘the durable installed generative principle of regulated improvisations [which produces] practices’ (Webb, 2008) (p. 36).*

These dispositions guides behavior and practice of agents. Capitals are sources of advantage that is the basis for class differences (Bourdieu, 1986). They are three forms: social, cultural



and economic. Social capital are those that create benefits from group memberships; cultural include non-financial assets like education; and economic are those stemming directly from wealth. Bourdieu's surmised that both social and cultural capital are transferable to economic capital. Within the context of this chapter, economic capital refers to the boys' socio-economic (SES) backgrounds<sup>1</sup> (Stockfelt, In Press; Stockfelt, 2015); social capital as type of school (traditional grammar versus newly upgraded – see subsections 'Schools'); and cultural capital as beliefs or dispositions towards/about HE. Social capital was interpreted in this manner due to the level of credence it holds within these boys' educational space. Being included as a member of a traditional high performing school (School A) brand pupils as being smart, with a potential for success; while the latter school (School B) possessed no such value or prestige. Bourdieu view cultural capital in three ways: embodied, objectified and institutionalized. Cultural capital in its embodied form had the most relevance in the study as it focusses on dispositional traits influenced by beliefs.

Field exist as the space within which habitus develops. For Bourdieu, the concept of a field is quite layered and based on the different existing social forces (social structures and capitals) exerting their influence on the agents, internalized to create the habitus, and externalized by the habitus through agency and practice; henceforth, exerting its influence within this field. Bourdieu (1990) defines field as structured spaces of positions with its own regulations and tiers of dominance, where agents compete for limited resources. Within the context of this paper, field is operationalized with respect to the educational space where these boys co-exist. I hesitate to label this as 'school' as within the Jamaican culture/subculture, formalized education exist in a shared space between the home, school, community and educational policies. Home-work, extra-lessons<sup>2</sup> and after school clubs<sup>3</sup> were very much a part of the participants' learning spaces. Bourdieu's thesis perceives agents as being demarcated by their position in relation to their access to resources that confer power and status (capital) (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). Their resultant experience based on their level of capital within their field help to define the intrinsic traits (habitus) of the agents themselves. Conceptually, boys' EA within the research context is seen to be influenced by their primary/secondary experience of

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<sup>1</sup> Measured based on a summary of the following: occupation of parents (usually mothers as the sample reflected the Jamaican context of majority single-mother household), size of family, and number of individuals in one household and the location of their community (see Stockfelt, 2015, 2015b for a deeper discussion of SES in this context)

<sup>2</sup> After school learning usually taught in the same class and by the same teacher

<sup>3</sup> Usually within the community and generally sports related for boys

education (and about HE) based on their level of capital, which shapes their dispositional beliefs towards/about HE within their educational field. These concepts are 'flexible' tools through which Bourdieu describes the dynamism of structure, agency and practice. I have described these concepts as flexible as they have to be understood in context, i.e., they are adaptable to the society. In this respect, within the context of this paper, habitus is operationalized as dispositions about/towards HE inculcated through primary/secondary socialization. This disposition is connected to a personal agency and practice influenced by a 'gendered' view of HE.

### **Ethnographic approach**

Exploring the notion of agency with respect to such a dynamic concept as aspirations, requires a bottom-up, detailed qualitative methodology. An ethnographic "approach" was selected due to its bottom-up methodology that engages the researcher and the participants in a meaningful relationship. Approach is placed in quotation since I moved away from the anthropological roots of ethnography and engaged with the participants in a reflective participatory manner. This is highlighted as the researcher shared much in common – culturally - with the participants; i.e., a Jamaican, and an educator who spent years within the Jamaican system, being educated and educating at numerous levels. In addition, a systematic holistic approach was adopted to engage with pupils, teachers, parents and community members in a bid to gain an experiential understanding of the context and subculture in which these boys' EA were shaped.

The research was conducted within a 12 months period across two secondary schools: a traditional high achieving one (School A) and a newly upgraded low achieving school (School B) with high male drop-outs at/near year 9. The main method used was participant observations accompanied by semi/unstructured/narrative focus and one-to-one interviews. Approximately 64 participants were included in the study. This is an approximate figure, as with the nature of participant observation, knowledge gained is sometimes through secondary observation and experience with others not directly participating in the study. The participants included mainly pupils with some parents, community members and teachers. The sampling method involved a mixture of snowball, random and purposive sampling. The pupils were selected randomly across year groups 7-11, the parents and teachers were selected purposively based on the involvement of their offspring/pupils, and community members were selected mainly through snowball sampling. Most of these group interviews were supported by random discussions at

different time periods across both schools and throughout the research to ascertain a deeper level of understanding. The data were analyzed thematically using Nvivo for managing the dataset.

### *The schools*

Jamaica has different types of secondary schools. Two main types were the focus of the study: traditional grammar and newly upgraded. These were selected as they represented two main contrast within the Jamaican school system. Traditional grammar are those that has always been secondary schools and usually host pupils with the highest passes from the grade six achievement test (GSAT). This is a standardized test taken at the end of primary schooling which determine which “type” of secondary school pupils are sent to. Pupils with the lowest scores are usually sent to newly upgraded or junior secondary (secondary schools that stops at year 9). In this manner, the education system creates a clear demarcation from the outset, based on standardized grades. These GSAT results are indirectly interpreted as measures of ability as pupils are grouped accordingly in a process known as streaming (Evans, 2000). An added consequence of this is a clear demarcation between the pupils based on social-class - or in a Bourdieun context, economical capital. Pupils from lower SES backgrounds tended to perform much worse at the secondary level which creates further segregation, as schools also practice internal streaming where pupils are grouped annually based on an end of year examination. The result is higher drop-out rates for boys from lower SES backgrounds at newly upgraded schools. School A represents a high status traditional school, while School B represented a lower status school with lower attainment at the CSEC and higher drop-out rates for boys. This contrast was purposive to provide a comparative element in an attempt to understand the nature of boys’ EA and the role of their agencies within their educational field.

### **Summary of the Findings**

School, community and the family were identified as social-structures that had the strongest impact on boys’ personal agencies with respect to having EA. Participants regaled the positive impact of their maternal families, the negative impact of their communities and the surprising almost non-existent impact of their schools – except for the level of social capital it provided – as the reason for - or not - having EA. The positive role of maternal family had the strongest representation in the narratives, highlighted in its role in motivating EA and shaping positive dispositional beliefs about the role of HE. These participants expressed strong

desires/intentions to complete secondary school and move into HE to establish careers, professions or skills. This also include practical further education which for many without the economic means of financing university, was a way of staying in formal education and establishing viable careers for themselves. A key aspect of the finding was the inclusion of family members in the Jamaican diaspora in the UK, USA and Canada. This was quite common and represented an extension of their maternal family. For those boys with EA, their maternal family (locally and overseas) facilitated their agencies by providing economic support and motivation, thereby allowing them to realize this.

The narratives surrounding the community, included a tragic mix of fear of death/violence impacting on their academic performance; as well as exemplary role models that motivates their EA. The role of the community as a deterrent to EA came mainly from boys in the inner-city from lower SES backgrounds. Their stories included intense fear of: being killed in gang-related activities when communities were at war; and being forced to drop-out of school and join gangs to ‘protect’ their communities or avenge the death of loved-ones/community members. In addition, many of these boys were unable to relate to success stories through HE from within their communities - with the exception of community members that had migrated. An extended aspect of this theme involved an altruistic view of education for the greater good. This was linked to citizenship values that these boys “owned”. A notion that education was important for the good of themselves, family, wider community and the nation. Such ideas reflected the ones embedded within the educational policies (see below) but seemed to exist in isolation with respect to many boys from School B and those from lower SES backgrounds. That is, these boys echoed these sentiments in relation to it being an ideal, an existence within a world where they all had the same level of capitals and henceforth opportunities. However, in practice they exhibited limited tolerance of education as seen in their lower participation in their school day to day activities, and evidenced in their lack of EA.

The lack of narrative about the role of the school was astonishingly limited. When mentioned, boys tended to relate some positive and negative experiences with teachers that confirmed their already existing view of education as being important or pointless. At face value, this gave the impression that the role of school was minimal. However, what became crucial during follow-up interviews was the importance of the type of school these boys attended. This was already informed from the literature (see subheading – schools), however, as discussed below, boys

exhibited different views of the value of education based on the schools they were affiliated with.

### *The Boys' Story*

The results of the study showed no comparative difference across both schools in the nature of these boys' educational aspirations (EA). Their EA were goal-oriented and based on an instrumental view of higher education (HE) as means to help them realize their life aspirations. In this manner, it was based on a desire *and* an intention towards HE but the onus was more on an intention as most see HE in terms of its transferability to economic and/or social capital. In doing so, boys tended to place the onus of their EA on themselves, in this manner showing ownership of their agencies within the institutions of homes, schools and communities. As a participant stated:

*'... Miss, we come here fi (to) drink milk, wi (we) nuh (do not) come here fi count cow; so mi (me) haffi (have to) work hard fi get weh (where) mi a go. Education a my milk, a nobody decision but my own whether mi go college or not... Some a dem (these) bwoy (boys) yah (here) a just a waste time... Fi dem choice!'*

Such sentiments were echoed by a majority across both schools. However, many from school B tended to ascribe to the following:

*'... Yeah, a my decision (intention), but at the end of the day, what's the point? My teacher have up her degree and she live inna (in) my community (poor inner-city community)... Mi nah go bruk nobody house mek (so) police come shoot mi, but might as well go hustle (join the small informal business sector)... Education nuh (do not) mek (make) no (any) money unless yuh name Mr. So-and-So (implies a male that is wealthy) or yuh deh a foreign (Jamaican diaspora of the USA, UK, and Canada)...'*

Implicit within this argument and the narratives, was the idea that having limited economic capital interacts with the transferability of HE to wealth; therefore they feel as if they were exercising their personal agencies by choosing not to have EA. The problem with such a viewpoint is the fact that agency in such a context is not free, but hindered by their perception of – or/and actual - the position within that field and their belief about how this impacts on them. Indirectly, their beliefs about the value of HE is based on their view of social class as both an economic and a social capital, as many viewed it as an exclusive group that regurgitated the social-structure that they have experienced within the confines of the inner-city. To elaborate, a participant explained:

‘... Miss, mi neva see nobody from my community get rich from college yet! Well, unless dem run (athletics) or play ball (football)... Sometimes yuh just tie yourself in debt and then yuh can’t get a job... Unless embassy free yuh up (implying migrating to the Jamaican diaspora).’

In this manner, they relate to their primary and secondary experience/observation of/with HE within their community to make – what they perceived as – an informed decision about their intention towards HE. Such arguments connects with Bourdieu’s critique of the space of school, that it reproduces social inequalities (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977). According to Bourdieu & Passeron (1977), education operate as a source of social control in its reproduction of social structures by the dominant class who utilizes their power to ensure schools operated in this manner. Pupils begin schooling on unequal footing based on their level of cultural capital. Schools do nothing to offset this, but instead reward those with higher capitals, henceforth increasing and maintaining inequalities. Working class pupils are theorized as passively accepting their ‘failure’ based on class disadvantages, or establishing counter-school cultures as a form of resistance. Whatever their “choice” the outcome still results in a reinforcing of their subordinate positions.

The problem with this critique of the space of school within the research context, was the fact that some boys across both schools who were from lower SES backgrounds, also had EA. The main reason provided in the narratives, was what I referred to as *deferred higher educational aspirations* (Stockfelt, 2015, 2015b). This is a term that was coined in relation to the result of the study that showed some boys across both schools reporting EA, if the opportunity to migrate to the Jamaican diaspora presented itself. Boys who demonstrated and narrated this phenomena, justified this based on their experience of witnessing family/community members becoming economically and socially successful through education only after migrating to these higher income countries and receiving an education. Here, boys did not demonstrate a passive acceptance of the rules of their field – neither failing nor rebelling but aspiring towards a route not written into the script of their school but very common within their home/community environments. That is, Jamaica has a large diaspora in the UK, USA and Canada. The diaspora exists as an alternate form of income that provides economic capital to families and the country on a whole through remittance (McLean, 2008). According to McLean (2008), the diaspora accounted for 15.3% of Jamaica’s GDP in 2007. This figure was higher than Bauxite and tourism, which are two of Jamaica’s main sources of income. The impact of the diaspora goes beyond the economic to encourage the development of cultural capital in its embodied state. This was identified within the narrative based on the constant encouragement and support

provided by relatives in the diaspora, to ensure the educational success of their younger family members in Jamaica. According to most participants, the diaspora echoes the message of “education for the greater good”, “education to boost Jamaica’s global competitiveness”, “education to reduce crime/violence” and “education for personal/financial growth/gain”. Participants at School A identified with this and echoed this in their narratives. This also occurred at School B, but many participants also viewed this as ‘true’ only if one migrated to the diaspora itself, or if one hailed from a higher social-class. These messages from the diaspora reflects that which is propagated in the education policies; i.e., education will boost development as a whole.

### *Policy Perspective*

EA are multi-dimensional and develop throughout the socialization process within these boys’ educational field, limited by the governing political and economic situation; that is, policies relating to cost-sharing of secondary/tertiary education, the country’s economic downturn which decreases opportunities for employment etc. As reflected in the discussion so far, education is only viewed as a capital for these boys insofar as their perception of its transferability to economic and social capital. This results in a discrepancy between a top-down policy implementation towards education for development, and targeted “at-risk” boys’ limited view and experience of it. That is, boys aspired towards schooling and HE if they perceived it as a route to realize their wider life aspirations. “Life aspiration” is used here in reference to their overall and most distinctive goals and desires for the future; both intrinsic and extrinsic life goals. Intrinsic life goals are those stemming from the self and motivated from within, for example, goals like becoming the best they can be and pro-social ones like helping their family, community or their country (citizenship values) (Ryan, Huta, & Deci, 2008; Williams, Hedberg, Cox, & Deci, 2000). Extrinsic life goals were those based on outside motivation, like life aspirations towards wealth, fame and power (Kasser & Ryan, 1996). As explained by a participant from the inner-city at School A:

*‘... All this war, killing and violence, not putting anything any better... I want to become a soldier, help people, help the community, stop the crime and all that stuff that has been going on in this country... That’s why I need the subjects (getting the 5 A-C’s synonymous with high attainment), you need this to go university and to get in the army... I need to educate myself so I can teach the little youths them... That was our parents responsibility, nuff (lots) a them failed, so it’s up to us... Jamaica is up to us...’*

Such beliefs exhibit EA built on prosocial goals and feelings of responsibilities towards their immediate and local communities. Here boys voiced an intention towards HE despite being disadvantaged by limited economic and social capital. At school A, such ideas were usually accompanied by high embodied cultural capital exhibited in their avid belief in the exchangeability of HE for social and economic advancement. However, as mentioned earlier (see summary of findings), some boys – with limited economic and social capital - echoed this view but were more motivated by extrinsic life goals. At School B, these boys tended to have lower levels of embodied cultural capitals, that is, did not see HE as being instrumental in attaining economic and social advancement. These boys represented the “at risk” category that is the target of many government policies to increase development and reduce crime rates.

The situation becomes more complex when evaluating from the global perspective. The role of the diaspora exist as an anomaly that boosts the idea and the feasibility of boys having EA based on its narrative of education for socio-economic advancement. However, within the local context, this conflicts with the increased burden of the cost of HE and taxation experienced by the private sector; i.e., a belief in the role of HE unsupported by the reduced ability to support this. Such burden is a reflection of the overarching global trends and “tied” policies in relation to education and human development (Sullivan & Shreffin, 2003). For example, Jamaica receives loans from the IMF based on a “*conditionality*” of acceptance of its neo-liberal policies including those connected to education (IMF, 2011; Johnston & Montecino, 2011). Jamaica also receives similar influence from the human capital agenda through aid/loan from the World Bank (World-Bank, 2009). According to Mundy (2005), the IMF and the World Bank affect lower-income countries through the spread of their ideas to establish finance driven reforms which include shifting public spending from higher to lower levels of education and opening the way for the private sector to fund secondary and higher education. These reforms are sometimes seen as a deterrent to development as it limits the government expenditure on education, increase taxes and freeze wages; measures that may have a demoralizing impact on an already weak economy and structures (Johnston & Montecino, 2011). The result is a limited economy which in turn limits the experiences, possibilities and personal agencies of the targeted population – youths.

As reported in the Jamaica Gleaner (Clarke, 2011), Mark Weisbrot, the director for the Centre for Economic and Policy Research (CEPR), a think tank stated that:



*“Jamaica is a clear case where the IMF and other international actors have put the economy in a straitjacket”*

This was further elaborated in the actual report by CEPR concluding that:

*“...Jamaica’s agreement with the IMF has included pro-cyclical macroeconomic policies during the current downturn. This unfavorable policy mix risks perpetuating an unsustainable cycle where public spending cuts lead to low growth, exacerbating the public debt burden and eventually leading to further cuts and even lower growth.”*

The IMF agreement with Jamaica, places a high burden of taxation on a struggling private sector (parents) that is also “encouraged” by the World Bank to help finance HE. The Government of Jamaica (GOJ) has abolished tuition fees at the secondary level of schooling to increase the quantity of the student population and meet their target for improved participation (GOJ, 2009b). However, while doing so, it reduced the subsidy to HE and to payment of external examinations at the secondary level (Jamaica-Observer, 2010). In addition, secondary schools still charge a fee equivalent to tuition, usually disguised as “maintenance” since the government has not provided proper replacement for the loss of this income. Overall, this situation creates a clear discrepancy between the view of education as an instrument for development and the reality of students/families that are expected to finance this. Overall, the discrepancy between these two opposing principles, created by the overarching local (and global) political and economic situation, impacts on these boys educational field and place a strain on the quality of education offered; as schools, staff, students and their families sometimes exist under economically and socially strenuous circumstances.

A male student’s educational experience is related to the level of economic capital he has at his disposal. Evaluated within the context of this study, it is unsurprising that boys’ EA are based on their instrumental view of its transferability to economic capital. If boys are unable to connect education to their wider aspirations, it is unlikely that they will aspire accordingly. The narratives showed a tendency of boys from lower SES background and lower performing school (School B) not having EA. These pupils also reported weaker beliefs in the value of education within the Jamaican context where many had no intention to move on to HE and in extreme cases expressed the desire to drop out of secondary school altogether. This goes to the root of Jamaica’s problem with boys’ poorer participation in school and representation at the tertiary level. The government’s abolishment of tuition fees at the secondary level of schooling was a step forward in terms of supporting their view of education as a means to enhance development, both on the part of pupils and for the country on a whole. It can be said – based on the result of this study - that these boys shared a similar but different view of education to

that of the government. The similarity existed in their instrumental view of education, i.e., its potential for intrinsic and extrinsic growth. However, they differed based on these boys' extrinsic reality and their beliefs about the value of education. Their extrinsic reality included not only their limited economic capital and sharing the cost of education, but their level of social capital based on the 'value' of their school within their educational field. Such capital is based on the view that these group memberships inferred limited academic ability and less potential for success through education. This view is not farfetched since according to Evans (2000) and Bailey (2003), traditional grammar schools far outshine newly upgraded high schools on the major standardized high school examinations – the Caribbean Examination Council exams (CXC) (now CSEC). Bailey (2003) further elaborated that attaining five CXC passes - including mathematics, English language and IT - is connected to future attainment. Such perspectives are called upon in the government strategies supporting education as a human capital critical for development (GOJ, 2009, 2009b)

The educational field established by structures like the family, school community and the government (through educational policies) provide the context through which socialization occurs and dispositional beliefs about/towards HE are shaped. These experiences are shared in a form of “class habitus” where boys’ personal agencies are mutually limited by their level of capitals in a false sense of autonomy. In this manner, boys from similar background “chose” to aspire – or not - towards HE because of their rational evaluation of their level of economic and social capital, supported by their belief in the value of HE (Bourdieu, 1977).

### **Implications**

Boys’ agencies are limited by the social structures within their educational field. This in turn affects practice, mediated by EA, with boys under-participating, underachieving and being underrepresented in HE. Boys need to see the link between schooling, education and practice. For example, in relation to the current global trend, the Jamaican government needs to focus more on skill-based education to enhance practical knowledge and increase employability. Therefore, at the school-level, it is critical to: flag the importance of a skill-based further education along with higher education; make clear the connection between education/schooling and possible future outcome; and expose boys to other possibilities or success stories of higher education outside of what they have experienced within their communities.

The significant influence of the family and community highlights the need to focus more on home-school-community cooperation. This could range from an active Parents Teachers Association (PTA) to programs where relevant parents/community members could share their stories of success/failures, hopes/regrets with boys. Such real life stories may help to connect the content learnt in school, their level of participation and the decisions they make about the future with that of their 'real world'. In this manner, making the connection between education and possible outcome as well as incorporating the family and the community. Such a venture could be more beneficial if the family/community of the diaspora were also involved in the process. This is quite relevant as most participants in the study identified a direct contact and influence of some family member (and community) from the diaspora on their educational experiences and aspirations. Therefore, the existence of the diaspora should be incorporated more at the level of schools as the findings indicated their positive role in boys having EA. This would match the government's objectives and reduce the possibilities of boys dropping out of the school system, joining gangs and increasing the country's economic and social burden.

Finally, at the policy level, educational policies might be more effective if they match the needs of the target population. In this manner, understanding the EA of these boys and finding ways to reduce the negative impact of limited capitals. For example, removing the practice of streaming pupils both at the beginning and during secondary schooling. Studies have consistently highlighted the positive impact of mixed-ability classes and the negative impact of streaming (Boaler, 2008; EEF, 2014). In addition, more needs to be done about providing materials like access to computer, after-school homework club etc., to make it feasible for boys disadvantaged by limited economical capital to thrive. The GOJ have attempted to improve instructional material – like access to computers - as stated in their policy (GOJ, 2009). The impact of this is yet to be seen.

## **Conclusion**

The chapter utilized the literature to provide a detailed analysis of reasons for boys' underrepresentation in higher educational (HE) institutions in Jamaica. It offers an added explanation about the nature of boys educational aspirations (EA) based on the findings of a study conducted across two very different schools in urban Jamaica. The findings are discussed in relation to Bourdieu's concept of structure and agency and the role these play in guiding practice. Boys' educational aspirations were shown to be goal-oriented and based on a practical

view of HE in its transferability to economic and social capital. That is, boys tended to have EA insofar as they their view of it as being instrumental for social and economic advancement. Generally, less boys from the lower status/achieving school (School B) and lower SES backgrounds perceived HE as important in the success of their life aspirations and tended not to have EA. The exception were those with deferred EA, encouraged by the Jamaican diaspora in the UK, USA and Canada. Overall, boys autonomy to have EA or not, is limited by social structures in relation to their level of capital within their educational field.

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