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Intragroup Conflict among Caribbean Students in Higher Education while engaging in Group Work

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Intragroup Conflict among Caribbean Students in Higher Education while engaging in
Group Work

by

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Table of Contents

List of Tables

Abstract

A qualitative phenomenological study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Caribbean students in higher education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. The site for this study was the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago, and the participants were nine Caribbean students studying at the higher education level in the Republic who experienced intragroup conflict while engaging in group work. An interpretative phenomenological analysis was used to gain insight into the phenomenon and the key theories forming the theoretical framework were interpersonal theory, group development theory and intragroup conflict theory. The following master themes emerged: 1) negative interactions with resultant concern; 2) difficulty and injustice without desired assistance; 3) desiring to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict; 4) feeling powerless and wanting to give up or giving up; 5) negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions; 6) coping with the conflict: cognizant but not engaging; 7) identity and perception: who I am and who I am to others. The findings of this study give voice to students of the Caribbean in higher education, provide valuable insight and add richness and depth to the already existing literature on intragroup conflict. It can be a catalyst in transforming the manner in which conflict resolution practitioners and educators interact with students who experience the phenomenon.

Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the study

Group work is used frequently in higher education as a pedagogical tool to enhance the learning process of students and to prepare students for the workplace. This is because, in modern times, there are increasing industry demands for graduates with more applicable skills particularly so that they can function effectively in the global community (Coers, Williams, & Duncan, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2017; Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, 2015). Employees are often required to work in teams and, in such instances, have to rely on teamwork in order to effectively accomplish assigned tasks. As such, the ability to work effectively with others is a skill valued by employers from prospective employees (Burch &Anderson, 2008) and therefore a skill which is given priority in tertiary education globally and in the Caribbean. In the twin-island democratic Republic of Trinidad and Tobago (ROTT), group work has also become an important aspect of higher education.

ROTT is located in the Southern Caribbean, off the east coast of Venezuela. In the last population census in 2011, ROTT had a population of approximately 1.3 million persons (Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). This Republic has a diverse cultural and religious background with its population comprising of two main ethnic groups, persons of East Indian and African descent. There is also a large percentage of persons of mixed descent and smaller groups comprising of European, Chinese and Middle Eastern descent (Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). The religious composition of the population is diverse with several faiths and denominations including, Roman Catholics, Pentecostals/Evangelic/Full Gospel,

Anglicans, Hindus, Muslims, Jehovah's Witnesses, Presbyterians, Seventh Day Adventist

and Baptists (Ministry of Planning and Sustainable Development, 2012). While English

language is the principal language of ROTT, there are persons in the Republic who also

speak Spanish, Hindi, Patois and English Creole.

      The education system in the ROTT comprises of the pre-primary, primary,

secondary and post-secondary or tertiary levels. The Ministry of Education is the body

responsible for tertiary level education. Higher education is provided both by public and

private institutions. Over recent years there has been an increase in the demand for higher

education in Trinidad and Tobago which has led to an increase in both public and private

tertiary institutions, in an attempt to meet the increased demands (Kassim, Dass, & Best,

2015; Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, 2010). This increase is in

line with the trends in global higher education (Kassim et al., 2015).

      Additionally, the students attending the various tertiary institutions in the ROTT

are quite diverse. This diversity is based on several factors, including age, sex, race,

culture, ethnicity, academic qualifications, work experience and socio-economic

backgrounds (Kassim et al., 2015). There is acknowledgement of the increasing diversity

and heterogeneity among the Caribbean students in the various tertiary institutions in the

Caribbean including the ROTT (Kassim et al., 2015; Pragg, 2014).

      Education has been viewed by the Government of the Republic of Trinidad and

Tobago (GROTT) as critical to the development of the Republic and has been given high

priority for the sustainable development of the nation. As such, over the years there have

been many initiatives towards the improvement of the quality and accessibility of

education at all levels including at the tertiary level (Ministry of Education, 2017;

Ministry of Planning and Development, 2008; Ministry of Science, Technology and Tertiary Education, 2010; Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, 2015; Standard Basic Assistance Agreement, 2006; Vision 2020 Multi-Sectoral Group, 2006).

In its 2015 initiative articulated in a nation policy framework (Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, 2015), the GROTT identified that the policy was aligned to a Sustainable Development Goal which addresses "inclusive and equitable education and the promotion of lifelong learning opportunities for all" (p. 3). Two of the overarching goals articulated in this policy relate directly to group work in higher education. These were the implementation of a tertiary education and a skill training that produce "graduates with life skills, transferable skills and employability skills including critical-thinking and problem-solving" (p. 6) and that relate to and address "the current and anticipated needs of the labour market at local, regional and international levels" (p.6).

One of the highlighted priority areas in the policy for development by 2025 is "graduates with employable skills, competency and entrepreneurial attitudes" (p. 41). Employability skills are defined to include communicating ideas and information, planning and organising activities, working with others and in a team solving problems (OAS Assessor Training (as cited in Ministry of Tertiary Education and Skills Training, 2015). Accordingly, the Ministry recognises the importance of integrating work-based learning in higher education by including "authentic practical activities" to enhance employability (p. 43) and insists that tertiary institutions "must provide high-level occupational preparation in a more applied and less theoretical way" (p. 43). As a result, group work, as in other parts of the world, has become an integral component of the

education and training in tertiary education in the ROTT. The component of group work in education and training is consistent with one of the student learning outcome stated by the Ministry of Education for post-secondary students, that is, that students 'be fit for employment in the global village'(Ministry of Education, 2017 p. 40).

Researcher's Context

Group work is very much a part of the curriculum at a tertiary educational institution in the ROTT, where I am a Course Director responsible for one of the vocational courses at the institution. At this institution, students from various parts of the Caribbean with bachelor degrees are trained to become professionals in a particular field. The highly vocational nature of the training at this institution, along with the demands of the industry, underscore the significance of students having the applicable transferable skills to function in the profession when they graduate from the institution.

Group projects at the institution continue yearly with students having approximately three group projects in any given academic year. Many students have expressed negative attitudes towards working in groups on group projects that are to be assessed and as a Course Director, I have had several informal reports of intragroup conflict among students as they engage in the group projects. From my interaction with students involved in such conflict, there appears to be an intensity of emotions which may be a possible reflection of the impact of the conflict on the students. Also, I have often sensed a level of frustration from the students in attempting to express what they are feeling as they experience conflict within their groups.

In addition, my own experiences as a student both in the master's degree program and the PhD program in a tertiary educational institution have exposed me to intragroup

conflict. As a student, I have seen group work spawn intragroup conflict among my peers on several occasions. Some of these occasions have been within groups in which I was a group member as well as among groups of which I was not a member. I observed informally the apparent intensity of negative emotions, perceptions and frustration experienced by those of my peers who were experiencing the intragroup conflict. Additionally, I have observed the negative effects of such conflict on group members, the group as a whole and group outcomes, if such conflict was not properly addressed.

My informal observation and interaction with my students and peers who have experienced intragroup conflict have sparked my interest in the phenomenon of intragroup conflict among students in higher education. It is this interest that has propelled me to investigate what has been studied on this phenomenon of intragroup conflict among students doing group work. In particular, I am interested in the lived experience of the students as they experience the conflict. It is my belief that knowledge of the lived experiences of the students as they experience conflict within their groups will allow for meaningful intervention by educators and conflict management practitioners.

Previous Studies on Group Work and Intragroup Conflict

A review of the literature indicates that group work among students in tertiary education has been the subject of much research with a variety of aspects of group work being studied. Some of these studies have dealt with the stages of group development (Smith, 2001; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977; Wheelan, Davidson & Tilin, 2003), the impact of teaching group development knowledge on group work skills (Coers et al., 2010), the perceptions of students with respect to group work (Bentley, 2013,

Burdett, 2003; Chiriac, 2014), the impact of teaching group skills on students' attitudes towards group work (Hamer & O'Keefe, 2013; Synder, & Mc Neil, 2008) and teachers perceptions and expectations in group work (Borg, Notander, Petersson & Ohlsson, 2011; Koh, Wang, Tan, Liu & EE, 2009).

Also, numerous benefits of group work have been identified in the literature such as the development by students of interpersonal and workplace skills (Mello, 1993). Several challenges which have the potential to undermine the benefits of group work, have also been identified in the literature. One such major challenge is intragroup conflict among the students (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2005; Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009). However, even though such intragroup conflict is acknowledged in the literature (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2005; Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009) there does not appear to be many studies with respect to group work in which the central focus is on intragroup conflict among students in higher education. There are studies on intragroup conflict among students, for example, where the perceptions of the students with respect to team conflict were measured (Neumeyer, 2014) and the perceptions of the teachers were explored (Borg, Notander, Petersson & Ohlsson, 2011). In the latter study, one of the limitations of the study highlighted, was that the perceptions explored were that of the teachers and not that of the students. Nevertheless, there is a dearth in the literature with respect to any in-depth study into the lived experiences of students in higher education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in their group projects**.**

Further, a review of the literature on intragroup conflict reveals that the research in this area is voluminous. Empirical studies on intragroup conflict have examined the nature and impact of intragroup conflict for example in terms of its typology, antecedents

and outcomes and conflict moderators. Yet, the majority of these studies have focused on intragroup conflict in the organizational setting (Almost, 2010; Blanchard, 2013; de Wit, Greer, & Jehn, 2012; Greer, Jehn & Mannix, 2008; Jehn, 1995; Korsgaard, Jeong, Mahony, Pitariu, 2008) and much fewer have examined intragroup conflict in detail among students in an educational setting in higher education (Chan & Chen, 2010; Curseu, Boros & Oerlemans, 2012; Pang & Hung, 2012; Pluut & Curseu, 2012). However, there does not appear to be any empirical research that can provide deep insight into the subjective lived experiences of those who experience the intragroup conflict whether in an organizational setting or among students in higher education including students from the Caribbean.

Statement of the Problem

Intragroup conflict among students in higher education can pose serious challenges for students and educators alike, for example, based on the negative perceptions, emotions and outcomes that have been reported in the literature and those challenges can undermine the many benefits of group work. Consequently, in order to provide effective support and make meaningful interventions, educators and conflict management practitioners need to gain insight into the students' experience as they go through conflict within their groups. Notwithstanding the vast amount of research conducted on intragroup conflict in an organizational setting and among students doing group projects, there appears to be very little research considering with any depth, the subjective experience of those who are intimately involved in the conflict – the members of the organization or the students in the groups. As such, the literature as it is, does little to describe in any detail or depth, the subjective experience of the students who have

experienced or are experiencing intragroup conflict; it does not give sufficient insight into the personal experiences of the students with intragroup conflict.

As a consequence, there is a gap in the literature because of the lack of depth of meaning which can be obtained from the individual perspectives of the students who experience the intragroup conflict. This lack of depth of meaning limits the ability of conflict resolution practitioners to make meaningful interventions and the ability of educators in tertiary education to provide the requisite support to, and better assist students, where such intragroup conflict exists. Thus, there is a need to study in depth what students experience during intragroup conflict and to give voice to this experience by describing their lived experiences. It is my view that such sharing will provide valuable information for educators and conflict management practitioners as well as contribute positively to research in the education and conflict management fields.

Purpose of the Study

Accordingly, the purpose of this study was to gain an understanding into the lived experiences of students in tertiary education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. I sought to gain insight into how these students understand and make sense of their experiences in the face of the intragroup conflict. The aim was to provide a detailed description of their perspectives and experiential concerns in light of the conflict so as to give voice to what they are experiencing.

Research Questions

Therefore, the following are the research questions addressed in this study:

1. What is the lived experience of Caribbean students in higher educational programs who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work?

2. How do Caribbean students in higher educational programs understand and make sense of their lived experience of intragroup conflict?

Definitions of Key Terms

In this study, **conflict** is defined as a dynamic process that arises between interdependent parties who experience negative emotions as they perceive disagreements and interference to the attainment of interests and goals as a result of the disagreements (Barki & Hartwick, 2001; 2004). **Intragroup conflict** is defined as conflict arising between two or more individual members of a group. In the literature, there have been attempts to differentiate between **'groups'** and **'teams'** (Davies, 2009; Fisher & Hunter, 1997). However, in this study, the terms **'group**' and **'team'** are used interchangeably to mean two or more persons who are interdependent and are working towards achieving some common goal or objective. These terms are used interchangeably since both concepts have essentially the same characteristics (Franca & Lourenco, 2010; Guzzo & Dickson, 1996).

The terms **'work teams'** and **'work groups'** are used interchangeably to mean groups or teams working in an organizational setting. **'Group work'** is defined as the efforts of a small number of students who are working together to achieve a common purpose or specific goals, usually a project or assignment which is to be graded. This is in line with the definition in the literature provided by Felder & Brent (2007) for the term '**cooperative learning'** which according to these authors involves 'students working in teams on an assignment or project under conditions in which certain criteria are satisfied, including that the team members be held individually accountable for the complete content of the assignment or project' (p. 1). Therefore in this study **'group work'**,

'cooperative learning' and **'group projects'** are used interchangeably and are regarded as an educational tool used to simulate work teams in an organizational setting.

Additionally, '**tertiary education'** is defined as all education beyond the successful completion of secondary education or its equivalent. This definition includes but is not limited only to universities, and may include colleges, technical training institutes, community colleges, nursing schools, distance learning centers and various other institutions (Accreditation Council of Trinidad and Tobago, Act 16 of 2004). Also, even though the terms 'tertiary education' and 'higher education' have been distinguished in the literature (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 1998) in this study, 'tertiary education' is used interchangeably with 'higher education' as is often done in the Caribbean (Howe, 2011).

Overview of the Methodological Framework

As the researcher's aim was to describe the lived experiences of students experiencing intragroup conflict as they are involved in group projects and how they make sense of those experiences, a qualitative research methodology was chosen, using a phenomenological approach. Since phenomenology attempts to study the human experience as it is lived, this approach was very useful in facilitating an understanding of the experience of the students as they undergo the experience of intragroup conflict.

In particular, the researcher utilized interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to describe the lived experiences of students and the meanings that they find in those experiences in the midst of the intragroup conflict. IPA was very suitable in addressing the research questions since it is a qualitative approach that allows insight into how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2012). The

use of this methodology provided the opportunity to the students to describe their

individual experiences, their perceptions, their feelings and their understanding in their

own terms. It also facilitated a thorough and detailed examination of the subjective lived

experience of the students as they told their stories providing the avenue for the

researcher to understand those experiences and how they made sense of them and the

meanings that they ascribed to them (Smith, 2004).

In my review of the literature, I have not found an interpretative

phenomenological analysis to have been applied previously to the topic of intragroup

conflict. It is my view that the application of this methodology facilitated an in-depth and

detailed understanding of the participants' lived experience with intragroup conflict that

is an invaluable source of information for both the fields of education and conflict

resolution.

Overview of Theoretical Framework

This study was guided by a theoretical framework based on, group development

theory, interpersonal conflict theory and intragroup conflict theory. Group development

theory is used to consider the intragroup processes and dynamics during the conflict. In

particular, I explored the theories of group development theorists such as Bennis and

Shepherd (1956), Bion (1961) and Tuckman (1965) to consider the phenomenon of

intragroup conflict. Interpersonal conflict theory was used as a basis for examining nature

of the conflict between the students within their groups. In particular, the

conceptualization of interpersonal conflict by Barki and Hartwick (2004) provided the

lens through which this intragroup conflict was explored. Finally, intragroup conflict

theory provided a guiding perspective into the complexity and multi-dimensional nature

of intragroup conflict including its typology, antecedents, consequences and conflict moderators.

Significance of the Study

Educators and conflict resolution practitioners need to understand what students experience as they go through intragroup conflict and how they make sense of these experiences. The insight gained in relation to such experiences allows educators and conflict resolution practitioners to effectively assist the students as they do their group projects. It facilitates timely, valuable and efficient intervention and the implementation of effective and relevant strategies so as to empower the students to deal with the challenges being experienced while doing group projects and in the future work environment when working in teams. In turn, this enhances the learning environment for students as they learn conflict management and teamwork skills. Furthermore, it enhances group effectiveness and performance not only in the academic environment but, ultimately, in the work environment.

As a result, this study is significant because of its positive implications for academic research, conflict resolution practice as well as for the field of education. This study not only adds richness and depth to the existing body of literature but also provides valuable insight and heightens the awareness of conflict resolution practitioners and educators in higher education as they encounter students who experience the phenomenon of intragroup conflict.

Overview of the Study

This chapter presented the background of this study including the context of the research site of this study and the researcher's context. It provided a brief overview of

previous studies on group work and intragroup conflict and articulated a statement of the problem, the purpose of this study and the questions sought to be addressed by this study. Further, an overview of the theoretical and methodological frameworks was presented, key words were defined and the significance of the study was explained.

Chapter 2 reviews the literature on group work in higher education and intragroup conflict. More specifically, chapter 2 first explores the literature on group work in education identifying its benefits and challenges and links the challenges to intragroup conflict among students. Then, intragroup conflict is considered through the lens of group development theory by considering the theories of some of the group development theorists. Next, intragroup conflict is explored at an interpersonal level using interpersonal conflict theory, and in particular, the Barki and Harwick (2004) framework. Finally, chapter 2 examines the literature on intragroup conflict with a review of the empirical studies on intragroup conflict in the organizational literature as well as the education literature.

Chapter 3 describes the research methodology to be used in this study. It discusses phenomenology as the research philosophy and the use of interpretative phenomenological analysis to unearth a rich description of the lived experiences of the participants and their sense making of the phenomenon of intragroup conflict.This chapter also explains the research process, including the data collection and data analysis processes as well as addresses ethical considerations. Chapter 4 addresses the results of the data analysis in terms of the problem statement in the Chapter 1. Chapter 5, the final chapter, discusses the findings of this study, its implications and limitations and provides suggestions for future research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of my study was to describe the lived experiences of Caribbean students in higher education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. I sought to describe how they understand and make sense of their experiences in the face of the intragroup conflict. As a result, in this chapter, I examined the body of research with respect to group work in higher education as well as the body of literature with respect intragroup conflict generally. More specifically, I explored the literature with respect to group work in education, its prevalence, benefits as well as challenges, many of which lead to or contribute to intragroup conflict. Thereafter, I considered intragroup conflict in the context of group development theory as well as interpersonal conflict theory, using the Barki and Hartwick (2004) framework. Finally, I examined the literature on intragroup conflict in general, examining how intragroup conflict has been studied in the literature.

Group Work in Higher Education

In many disciplines, group projects are incorporated into the curriculum aimed at providing opportunities for the development of transferable skills through the group experiences that occur as a result of these collaborative projects (Coers et al., 2010). The aim of group work in the classroom is to equip students with the teamwork skills such as communication, collaboration, cooperation and compromise (Coers et al., 2010). Group work provides a forum by which students can learn to interact with others productively and can be equipped with the requisite teamwork skills for the workplace alongside the

knowledge and skills of their various disciplines (Campbell & Ellingson, 2010; Fernandez-Breis, Castellanos-Nievesand, Valencia-Garcia, 2009; Gokhale, 1995).

      Benefits of Group Work. The use of group work in an educational setting is viewed as a means by which students can acquire skills that would be necessary for them to work with others in their future work environments. Several benefits of group work in an educational setting have been identified in the literature. Some of the benefits identified in the literature include the insights gained by students into group dynamics (Coers et al., 2010; Cook & Matheson, 1997; Mello, 1993), the production of more detailed and comprehensive assignments, better performance at a higher intellectual level (Gokhale, 1995; Mello 1993), student exposure to different perspectives and to group diversity, and the development of workplace skills (Cakmak, 2014; Gokhale, 1995; Hassanien, 2006; Mello, 1993).

      Other benefits identified are linked to students gaining and assimilating more knowledge and enhanced deep and long term learning (Hassanien, 2006; Keyes & Burns, 2008; Mills & Woodall, 2004; Shimazoe & Ardrich, 2010). Additionally, group work is identified as promoting transferable or life skills such as teamwork, decision-making, communication and interpersonal skills, analytical, cognitive, problem-solving, leadership and organizational skills (Bell, 2010; Cakmak, 2014; Gokhale, 1995; Keyes & Burns, 2008; Makaye, Chimugoti & Mapetere, 2017; Mills & Woodall, 2004; Vu, Rigby & Mather, 2011). Group work has been shown also to improve problem solving and critical thinking skills, intrinsically motivate students, increase creativity, and increase student satisfaction and achievement (Bell, 2010; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Keyes & Burns, 2008; Mills & Woodall, 2004; Shimazoe & Ardrich, 2010).

Social learning is another major benefit of group work in an educational setting. At the heart of group work, is the process of collaboration, whereby members of a group exchange ideas, knowledge, opinions, and emotions (Cakmak, 2014; Hassanien, 2006 Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2005; Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009) and collaborate not only to learn, but also learn to collaborate (Cakmak, 2014; Littleton & Miell, 2004). Accordingly, group work provides an environment for experiential learning as students learn to collaborate, negotiate and form social relations with their peers as they strive to achieve group cohesion while doing their group projects (Clinebell & Stecher, 2003). Such an environment facilitates the development of skills applicable to the reality of the work environment.

Consequently, group work has led to the development of social skills and improved social interaction (Cakmak, 2014; Shimazoe & Ardrich, 2010). Some of the social benefits of group work identified in the literature include the development collaborative, interpersonal, communication skills and higher cognitive skills (Bell, 2010; Cakmak, 2014; Keyes & Burns, 2008; Payne, Sumter & Monk-Turner, 2005; Vu et al., 2011). Also, it is suggested that group work contributes to higher self-esteem and the psychological well-being of students as a result of the social support and positive peer relations that can develop (Keyes & Burns, 2008). Therefore, students become more confident and display greater enthusiasm about the learning process (Makaye et al., 2017; Mills & Woodall, 2004). Additionally, in the literature on legal education, it has been argued that group work nurtures an ethical approach to the legal profession and legal activities such as litigation (Monson & Tichy, 2012).

Accordingly, group work has been found to encourage positive perceptions and attitudes towards learning and group work (Bentley & Warwick, 2013; Cakmak, 2014; Gottschall et al., 2008). In fact, it was found that when students perceived the benefit of group work as a means of learning, their attitude towards the group work was positive and they experience positive emotions such as hope, enjoyment and pride (Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Zschocke, Wosnitza & Burger, 2016). Hence, the literature indicates studies in which students reported their group work experience as a positive and useful learning experience notwithstanding the challenges they may have encountered while doing the group work (Bentley & Warwick, 2013; Burdett, 2003; Cakmak, 2014; Hassanien, 2006; Mills & Woodall, 2004).

Challenges of Group Work. Notwithstanding the benefits, group work can be quite complex and challenging. This is so particularly in student groups, where students, while acquiring the knowledge and skills of their various disciplines, have to simultaneously learn team skills, perform as a team and produce overall team project outputs which are graded. Challenges identified in the literature include task distribution, dysfunctional or faulty work or group process (Bailey, Barber & Ferguson, 2015; Kamau & Spong, 2015; Melles, 2004; Pang & Hung, 2012); assessment methods (Melles, 2004; Sridharan, Muttakin & Mihret; 2018),social challenges (Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009), co-ordinating challenges such as scheduling conflicts (Wilson, Ho & Brookes, 2018); trust issues (Huff, Cooper & Jones, 2002), work load issues and perceptions of inequitable contribution among team members (Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Hall & Buzwell, 2012; Hansen, 2006; Pang & Hung, 2012; Payne, Sumter & Monk-Turner, 2005, Wilson, et al., 2018).

Motivational issues have been identified also as a major challenge in group work as group work has been found to negatively impact student motivation (Davies, 2009; Kerr & Bruun, 1983). Such issues are manifested often in free riding, social loafing, and the sucker effect (Davies, 2009; Karau & Williams, 1993; Kerr & Bruun, 1983; Linnenbrink-Garcia, Rogat & Koskey, 2011). Free riders and social loafers obtain the benefit of the efforts of productive team members without contributing proportionally to the group project (Comer, 1995). Although free riding and social loafing have been distinguished in the literature, they have also often used interchangeably (Karau & Williams 1993; Linnenbrink-Garcia et al. 2011; Strong & Anderson, 1990). Both lead to the same result and can also lead one to the other with other group members reducing their effort because they feel disheartened (Comer, 1995) or so as not to be taken advantage of or as a 'sucker' (Comer, 1995; Kerr & Bruun 1983).

Social loafing and free riding have resulted in students feeling resentment due to perceived inequality of the workload (Comer, 1995; McCorkle, Reardon, Alexander, Kling, Harris, & Iyer, 1999) a reduction in trust among team members (Williams, Beard & Rymer, 1991); tension, frustration, group ineffectiveness, and dissatisfaction with the team and the project and (Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008; Hansen 2006). Social loafing and free riding are major contributors to intragroup conflict among team members which, if not properly managed may negatively impact team interaction, performance and the overall group project (Gottschall & Garcia-Bayonas, 2008).

The heterogeneity of group members intensifies the complexity of the intragroup dynamics as group members have to cope with different interpersonal styles, cultural differences, diversity of perspectives and disparate academic abilities and skills. For

instance, Kassim, Dass, & Best (2015) reported that in higher education in the Caribbean including ROTT, there has been an increase in the diversity and heterogeneity in the student body. This increase in diversity and heterogeneity is based, among other things, on age, gender, cultural, racial, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. Such diversity contribute to intragroup conflict as tensions can rise as students attempt to deal with the complexities of the group dynamics (Jehn, Northcraft & Neale, 1999; Miller et al., 1994).

Additionally, the literature suggests that students engaged in group projects often experience uncertainty and anxiety as a result of heterogeneous intragroup interactions where they have to communicate and collaborate with peers unfamiliar to them (Grieve & Hogg, 1999; Gudykunst, 2005; Strauss, Alice & Young, 2011). Such uncertainty and anxiety may be heightened by the temporary nature of the group which is unlikely to facilitate the climate of trust required to foster effective teamwork and cooperative learning based on the timeframe that the group is required to perform its task (Huff et al., 2002).

Alternatively, the temporary nature of the group may require the group to form trust quickly as a matter of necessity. However, such trust increases the risk of team members acting in a manner that demonstrates untrustworthiness and can produce damage within the group (Huff et al., 2002). As a result tension, friction, frustration and extreme conflict can arise among group members as uncertainty and anxiety are increased, particularly where the academic goals and abilities of the group members are not aligned and members are not contributing in accordance with expectations (Miller et al, 1994; Pieterse & Thompson, 2010).

Intragroup Conflict and Group Work. Group work is a breeding ground for conflict which is also a major challenge in group work. The literature indicate that many students engaged in group projects experience conflict within their groups (Borg et al., 2011; Chan & Chen, 2010; Park, Long, Choe & Schallert, 2018; Pieterse & Thompson, 2010; Wilson et al., 2018). Such conflict is often expected by students and professors and is frequently a concern and deterrent to both students and professors (Payne et al., 2005). This concern arises often because conflict can negatively impact group performances and group experiences and creates many social and emotional challenges for students if not effectively managed or addressed (Amason, 1996; Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009; Jehn & Mannix, 2001).

Many of the challenges identified above, cause or contribute to making group work a breeding ground for intragroup conflict among students. Free riding or the perception of unequal sharing of tasks among team members during group work has been identified as a major source of intragroup conflict and is one of the greatest concerns expressed by students across various disciplines (Bourner et. al, 2001; Gottschall & García-Bayonas, 2008; Hall & Buzwell, 2012; Pang & Hung, 2012; Wilson et al., 2018).

Additionally, it has been found that non-alignment or poor alignment of academic goals, abilities and skills led to extreme conflict among students or produced conditions for issues such as free riding and social loafing which then caused conflict (Pieterse & Thompson, 2010). Other causes of conflict among students identified in the literature included poor communication and task management, team members refusing to participate or to do their share of the work, team members having multiple competing obligations, difference in values, group members who prefer to work alone (lone wolves)

or who dominate the group, irresponsibility, competition for grades and the inability to effectively navigate the complexities of group dynamics (Bourner et. al, 2001; Chan and Chen, 2010; Davies, 2009; Hall & Buzwell, 2012; Hansen, 2006; Miller, Trimbur & Wilkes,1994; Oakley, Felder, Brent, & Elhajj, 2004; Park et al., 2018; Payne et al, 2005; Pfaff & Huddleston, 2003; Terri, Dixon, & Gassenheimer, 2005).

As a result of conflict and the other challenges of group work, which often lead to conflict, several studies and articles on the perceptions of students in higher education, as they engage in group work, reveal that many students have negative perceptions and opinions about working in groups (Akhtar et al., 2012; Bailey et al., 2015; Bentley, 2013; Bourner et. al, 2001; Burdett, 2003; Chiriac, 2014; Payne et al, 2005). Such negative perceptions and opinions may be reflected in the attitudes and behavior of students during group projects and often influence their attitude or approach towards future group work (Hansen, 2006; Livingstone & Lynch, 2000; Payne et al, 2005). Thus, the literature indicates studies in which students reported their group work experience as a negative experience. Many students expressed a preference for individual work, a low preference for group work or a lack of appreciation for group work as a result of their negative experiences with group work (Bolton, 1999; Bourner et. al, 2001; Burdett, 2003; Gottschall & García-Bayonas, 2008; Jung & Sosik, 1999; Payne et al, 2005; Wilson et al., 2018).

The literature indicates that the intragroup conflict experience often involves of a very strong emotional component in which negative emotions are experienced by students as they engage in group work and encounter challenges (Burdett, 2003; Curseu et al., 2012; Park et al., 2018). Such negative emotions include resentment (Burdett &

Hastie, 2009), frustration (Burdett, 2003; Lee, Smith & Sergueeva, 2016; Pang & Hung,

2012), anger (Burdett, 2003), hopelessness (Zschocke et al., 2016), confusion and anxiety

(Miller, Trimbur & Wilkes, 1994; Strauss & Young, 2011), distrust (Huff et al., 2002)

and discontent and dissatisfaction (Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008; Burdett & Hastie, 2009;

Hansen 2006). These negative emotions are heightened by the various challenges as well

as students' inability to deal with the conflict and perceived injustice (Aggarwal &

O'Brien 2008; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Riebe, Girardi & Whitsed, 2016) and lack of

guidance or direction from instructors or tutors (Bailey et al, 2015; Coers et al., 2010).

Group Development Theory

Group development theory presents the manner in which groups grow and change

throughout their life cycle. It also describes interpersonal as well as group processes and

issues that occur as the group evolves. Group development theory identifies that as

groups go through their life cycle, they experience intragroup conflict (Bennis &

Shepherd, 1956; Bion, 1961; Fisher, 1970; Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977;

Wheelan, Davidson & Tilin, 2003). In this study, I explored the theories of some of these

group development theorists and considered how these theories account for the

intragroup conflict that a group experiences as it evolves.

Two of those theorists are Bennis and Shepherd (1956) who postulated a theory of

group development based on research done over a five-year period with groups of

graduate students. Bennis and Shepherd (1956) believed that conflict occurred within the

group because of areas of internal uncertainty encountered by newly formed groups

which were obstacles to valid communication. They posited that groups moved through

two major phases of internal uncertainty in their development. The first major phase is

the dependence phase where, due to members' orientation toward authority, there is

preoccupation by members with power relations and conflict over authority issues. The

second major phase is the interdependence phase where due to members' orientation

toward intimacy, there is preoccupation by members with personal relations and conflict

over interdependence or intimacy issues. According to Bennis and Shepherd (1956):

> The core of the theory of group development is the principal obstacles to the
>
> development of valid communication are to be found in the orientation toward
>
> authority and intimacy that members bring to the group. Rebelliousness,
>
> submissiveness, or withdrawal as the characteristic response to authority figures:
>
> destructive competitiveness, emotional exploitiveness or withdrawal as the
>
> characteristic response to peers prevent consensual validation of experience. The
>
> behaviors determined by these orientations are directed towards enslavement of
>
> the other in the service of the self, enslavement of the self in the service of the
>
> other, or disintegration of the situation. Hence, they prevent the setting,
>
> clarification of, and movement toward group-shared goals. (p.416)

Bennis and Shepherd (1956) identify three types of members who emerge during

the dependence phase based on their responses to what is occurring in the group. One

such type is the dependent who finds comfort in structure, rules and procedure and

therefore seek out authority relations. Another type of group member is the

counterdependent who is uncomfortable with and does not trust authority structures and

therefore, challenges leaders and may even question the usefulness of the group. These

counterdependents are often in conflict with outspoken and assertive dependents. The

third type of group member emerging is the independent who observes and assesses what

is occurring in the group and can either respond by being submissive, rebelling or withdrawing. Bennis and Shepherd (1956) argue that what happens in the group during the dependence phase hinges on the interaction between these three types of members.

In explaining the group interaction in the dependence phase, Bennis and Shepherd (1956) subdivide this phase into three subphases: the **dependence-flight subphase**, the **counterdependent-fight subphas**e and **the resolution-catharsis subphase**. In the dependence-flight subphase, group members experience anxiety due the newness and uncertainty of the group experience. The dependents seek directions from leaders in relation to group interaction and the goals of the group; the counterdependents are seeking opportunities to challenge the leaders; and the independents are observing and assessing. Anxiety within the group increases when the leaders are unable to provide the directions sought or expected. This makes members increasingly uncomfortable and leads to the next sub-phase – the counterdependent-flight sub-phase where intragroup conflict is very prominent.

In the counterdependent-fight subphase, anxiety and stress are at a high level due to the lack of directions and specificity of goals of the group. The issue of power is very much the obvious concern in the group. The dependents and counterdependents who at this point consist of most of the group members, are in conflict and are polarized with the dependents seeking to reduce anxiety by fighting for structure in the group and the counterdependents opposing any such structuring of the group. Emotions are intense as the conflict is accompanied by hostility, feelings of anger, and disenchantment with leadership who is perceived ineffective and incompetent. Those members who are independent and not on either of the opposing subgroups are unable to resolve the

intragroup conflict which may then ensue into the resolution-catharsis subphase, and reach its utmost before group interaction changes.

At the beginning of the resolution-catharsis subphase, there is clear polarization between the dependents and counterdependents. There is an increase in tension and the intensity of emotions which simply cannot be sustained because group members are extremely uncomfortable with the conflict and the group can either retard in its development or move forward. Development occurs when there is effective intervention by the independents who may be able to influence a change in the group interaction and assist in resolving the issues so that group members now focus on shared norms and group cohesion.

The interdependence phase commences when group members, after having encountered and addressed the conflict about authority and power relations, now become preoccupied with personal relations with each other. This is referred to as the enchantment-flight subphase. Initially there is a shared feeling of cohesion and group harmony emerging from the resolution-catharsis subphase and group norms are produced to maintain this harmony. However, conflict occurs with the emergence of two types of personalities - the overpersonals who desire intimacy with other group members and want to maintain this harmony and the counterpersonals who do not desire intimacy and resist against any attempt at a forced harmony. There are also the independents who are comfortable with varying levels of interpersonal intimacy.

The conflict builds as the group moves into the next subphase – the disenchantment-fight subphase. Anxiety increases as interpersonal intimacy issues are brought to the fore. There are concerns with respect to gaining acceptance and

maintaining self-esteem and the overpersonals believe that intimacy will facilitate such acceptance and self-esteem while the counterpersonals believe that the avoidance of intimacy is key and there is conflict between these two personalities over the acceptable level of intimacy in the group. At this point, the behaviors being exhibited by group members include absenteeism, intellectualisation, tardiness, a questioning of the importance of the group. This conflict continues until the independents begin to play a more significant role as group members become aware of the threat to the group by the current group interaction. This intervention leads the group into the final subphase – the consensual validation subphase – where there is a move toward resolution of the conflict and agreement.

The leadership issues identified by Bennis and Shephard (1956) in their theory of group development also feature in Bion's theory of group development as does the issue of anxiety experienced by group members when a group is formed. Bion (1961) explains the intragroup conflict as being based on a group process at both a conscious and an unconscious level. Bion (1961) felt that anxiety occurred as a result of interpersonal issues within the group and that members' interaction within the group was based on attempts to deal with such anxiety. He argued that a group in its life operated on two dimensions as if it were a work group and a basic assumption group.

The work group functioned at a rational, conscious level to achieve its goals. This group is therefore task-oriented and cognizant of its purpose (Rioch, 1970). It operates at a conscious level with effort since concentration, skill and organization are required to achieve the task (Rioch, 1970). The other group was the basic assumption group, operating on an unconscious level in which group members are making irrational and

erroneous assumptions about group interaction and acting as if those shared assumptions are true. These assumptions, though tacit, are the basis for the behavior and emotional state of the group (Rioch, 1970). It is when the group is operating as a basic assumption group that conflict occurs as this group's tendency is away from the task and creates tension with the work group.

Bion (1961) identified three phases in the group life which occur as a result of assumptions made and which he believes recur in a group's development. The first he identified as dependency in which members become dependent on those who are assigned as leaders and who they expect to solve their issues or concerns and so remove their anxiety. Conflict occurs when their expectations are not met and they become disappointed, angry and hostile. The next phase is the flight/fight phase in which the group members attack leaders whom they believe have not lived up to their expectations. In this phase of the group's development, there is a sense that the group is being threatened and it must either fight or escape. During this phase, members may evade the group's goals and exhibit behaviors such as tardiness and absenteeism. The final phase is the pairing phase in which there is pairing within the group and the group now looks toward pairs of members with the hope that improved relations between the pairs will somehow save the group by influencing a more positive group interaction and atmosphere.

Tuckman (1965) who reviewed approximately 50 studies of group development and highlighted their similarities considered group development as functioning in two realms, the social realm and the task realm. The social realm refers to the 'interpersonal stages of group development' (p. 385) and how group members relate to one another

interpersonally. The task realm refers to the 'task behaviors exhibited in the group' (p. 385) and the interaction of group members as they relate to the relevant task which he calls 'task activity' (p. 385). Tuckman (1965) noted that group members operated in these realms at the same time and often through the same behavior and knitted the both realms together to come up with the stages of group development which have been defined as forming, storming, norming, performing and adjourning (Tuckman, 1965; Tuckman & Jensen, 1977).

In Tuckman's theory of group development, intragroup conflict among group members characterises the storming stage. In this stage, 'the newness of the group has worn off' (Tuckman, 1965, p.396) and emotionality and resistance are prominent. There is resistance to group influence and task demands. This resistance occurs because in the social realm there is intragroup conflict while in the task realm, group members are responding emotionally to the task requirements (Tuckman, 1965). In this stage there is infighting among members. Members are hostile to the leader and to each other and are in conflict over the group structure. There is polarisation regarding interpersonal issues and in relation to the direction of the group and a general lack of cohesion. Wheelan et al. (2003) refers to this stage as a period of counterdependency and fight where there is disagreement among the group members about the goals and procedures of the group. Conflict in the group at this stage may also arise because of the tension created between task-oriented behavior and people-oriented behavior as a result of individual members wanting to maintain their own individuality (Smith, 2001).

Interpersonal Conflict Theory – Barki and Harwick (2004)

Interpersonal conflict theory is very useful when considering intragroup conflict because it provides a basis by which we can explore the nature and source of the conflict at an interpersonal level. This is significant since intragroup conflict arises from the interaction and psychological processes of the individual members within the group and is multidimensional (Barki & Hartwick, 2004; Jiang, Zhang, & Tjosvold, 2013; Korsgaard et al., 2008). Barki and Hartwick (2004) provide a definition of interpersonal conflict which offers clarity as to the nature of the conflict experienced by students in higher education as they interact with each other in their groups as they do their group projects. Even though the focus of their research was conflict within organizations, the results of their research can be applied to this study because students doing group work have similar experiences of conflict as individuals who work in groups or teams in organizations (Mutch, 1998).

Barki and Hartwick (2004) presented a two-dimensional framework of interpersonal conflict after doing a comprehensive review of the literature on conflict within organizations in which they identified the constituent properties and targets of interpersonal conflict. In the first dimension, they identified fundamental properties of interpersonal conflict that generally simultaneously exist or are associated with situations of conflict and which reflected the 'principal cognitive, affective and behavioral elements' of interpersonal conflict (p. 232). The properties identified were disagreement, negative emotion and interference. It is based on the identification of these properties that Barki and Hartwick (2004) defined interpersonal conflict as 'a dynamic process that

occurs between interdependent parties as they experience negative emotional reactions to perceived disagreements and interference with the attainment of their goals' (p.234).

It is significant that Barki and Harwick (2004), in their conceptualization of conflict, underscored that conflict situations are the interpretations of individuals who perceive the simultaneous presence of the disagreement with and interference behavior of another party, and at the same time, feel negative emotions. These negative emotions arise because of their perception that such behaviors hinder the attainment of their goals or objectives. Accordingly, it is the perception and perspective of the parties that are significant when considering interpersonal conflict. Barki and Hartwick (2004) emphasise this element when they state that 'the interpersonal conflict is viewed as an individual's perception formed by his or her perceptions of disagreement, negative emotion and interference that are present in the situation'.

Disagreement in interpersonal conflict theory is identified as a cognitive state which is discussed often in the literature and which exists when parties perceive the existence of incompatibilities due to a differences for example in goals, interests, needs, opinions and values (Barki and Hartwick, 2004; Folger, Poole & Stutman, 2018; Hocker & Wilmot, 2018; Pruitt & Kim, 2004). Barki and Hartwick (2004) identified negative emotions that most prominently featured in the literature as associated with interpersonal conflict to include 'fear, jealousy, anger, anxiety and frustration (p. 232). They also described interference behavior as such behaviors engaged in by one party which are perceived to 'interfere with or oppose' the attainment of the interests, goals or objectives of another party (p.232).

The second dimension of interpersonal conflict presented by Barki and Hartwick (2004) provides further enlightenment on the nature of the conflict experienced by students as they engage in group work, by presenting the targets of the interpersonal conflict. With regard to this second dimension, Barki and Hartwick (2004) distinguish the targets of interpersonal conflict from the properties of the conflict, identifying and specifying what the disagreement, negative emotion and interference behavior are usually about. These targets are identified as the task, the task process and the interpersonal relationship. In a conflict situation, the focus may be either on the task (whether the content and or the process) or on the interpersonal relationship or alternatively on all three. Barki and Hartwick (2004) hypothesizes that nature of the target or targets of interpersonal conflict may influence the intensity of the conflict between parties who perceive the existence of all three properties of interpersonal conflict in relation to the target or targets.

The conceptualization of interpersonal conflict presented by Barki and Hartwick (2004) is very useful when considering intragroup conflict among students in higher education, particularly, from a phenomenological approach. It is significant because it emphasizes that the focus is on the perceptions, perspectives and feelings of group members as they interact with each other and work toward accomplishing the objectives of the group. Accordingly, based on their framework, intragroup conflict can be said to exist because two or more group members perceive that there is some disagreement or incompatibility within the group, which in their minds would interfere with the attainment of their goals so these members experience negative emotion as a result of their perceptions. Moreover, by distinguishing the targets of interpersonal conflict from

the properties of the conflict so as to identify and specify what the disagreement, negative emotion and interference behavior are usually about, Barki and Hartwick (2004) provide a typology of interpersonal conflict. This typology is significant because it allows for deeper exploration of the nature and type of the intragroup conflict among group members.

Accordingly, based on the framework of Barki and Hartwick (2004), where the focus of the conflict among the students engaged in group work is on the content of the task, it means that there is perceived disagreement, interference behavior and negative emotions within the group with respect to what should be done by group members. Similarly, where the focus of the interpersonal conflict is the task process, there would be perceived disagreement, interference behavior and negative emotion in relation to how the task should be done by the group members. Finally, where the target of the conflict is the interpersonal relationship, the perceived disagreement, interference behavior and negative emotions would be in relation to perceived interpersonal incompatibilities. Additionally, based on the Barki and Hartwick (2004) model, the intensity of the intragroup conflict among the students is very likely influenced by the nature of the target or targets of the perceived disagreement, interference behavior and negative emotion of the group members.

Intragroup Conflict

Intragroup conflict has been extensively researched in the literature and there are numerous studies conducted which have focused specifically on intragroup conflict (Almost, 2010; Blanchard, 2013; de Wit, Greer & Jehn, 2012; Greer, Jehn & Mannix, 2008; Jehn, 1995; Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Korsgaard, et al., 2008; Nibler & Harris, 2003). Many of the studies on intragroup conflict focused on the antecedents of

intragroup conflict (Almost, 2010; Korsgaard et al.; 2008), the typology of intragroup conflict (Greer et al, 2008; Jehn, 1995; Jehn & Mannix, 2001), and conflict moderators such as intragroup trust, conflict management strategies and emotion regulation (Dechurch et al, 2007; Curseu, Boros & Oerlemans, 2012; Peterson & Behfar, 2003). Others have concentrated on the relationship of intragroup conflict on such variables as group effectiveness and performance, collaboration and satisfaction, member's intent to stay in the group (de Wit et al., 2012).

Antecedents. Many antecedents of intragroup conflict have been identified in the literature. These include demographic diversity such as race, age and gender (Pelled, Eisenhardt & Xin, 1999), group size (Amason & Sapienza, 1997), task or goal uncertainty and incentive structures (Mooney, Holahan & Amason, 2007), lack of information sharing (Moye & Langfred, 2001), higher task interdependence (Korsgaard et al., 2008) and the psychological characteristics and needs of group members (Chun & Choi, 2014; Korsgaard et al., 2008).

The complexity of intragroup conflict is underscored with research considering the antecedents of conflict across levels and highlighting the multilevel nature of intragroup conflict (Korsgaard et al., 2008). The literature indicates that there are individual, dyadic and group level antecedents of the intragroup conflict process. Individual-level antecedents are factors concerning the individual, while dyadic-level antecedents pertain to the relationship between parties and group-level antecedents relate to 'shared perception or experience among group members' (Korsgaard et al., p.1234). Consequently, intragroup conflict can emerge from individual-level antecedents such as personality traits and anti-social behavior; dyadic-level antecedents such as task

interdependence and power imbalances; and group-level antecedents such as task and goal uncertainty; goal incompatibilities, group structure and climate (Korsgaard, et al., 2008). Further, there may be an interplay between the levels which creates a relationship between the various types of conflict. As a result, individual level antecedents can initiate conflict within an individual which can then lead to interpersonal conflict between parties which can further lead to intragroup conflict (Korsgaard et al., 2008).

Intragroup Conflict –Typology. Intragroup conflict has been largely categorized into three types of conflict – task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict (Greer et al, 2008; Jehn, 1995; Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Pelled et al., 1999). Task conflict is conflict with respect to the task to be performed. This conflict involves differences in ideas, perspectives and opinions in relation to what is to be done by the group. This type of conflict has been identified in the literature on group work among students and has been described as being 'content-specific argumentation between different views and conception' (Lahti, Eteläpelto, & Siitari, 2004, p. 151).

Process conflict is conflict with respect to the process of performing the task of the group or conflict about the logistics of the task. In other words, it is conflict within the group regarding 'how task accomplishment will proceed' (Jehn & Mannix, 2001, p. 239). Such conflict is manifested among students doing group work for example, in the form of work allocation, heated arguments about responsibilities, commitment and issues of social loafing and free riding (Lahti et al, 2004; Gottschall et al., 2008). Task and process conflict are also collectively referred to as cognitive conflict (Jehn, 1997; Mooney, Holahan & Amason, 2007).

Relationship conflict is conflict about interpersonal incompatibilities and issues unrelated to the task such as values, personalities, age, gender, skills and work styles (De Church et al., 2007; Jarvenoja & Jarvela, 2009; Pelled, 1996; Pelled et al., 1999). Negative emotions, though existent in the other types of conflict, are very prominent in this type of conflict (Jehn, 1997). This type of conflict is referred to also in the literature as affective conflict (Jehn, 1997).

The three types of intragroup conflict generally described in the literature are consistent with the targets of conflict highlighted in the second dimension of the framework for interpersonal conflict put forward by Barki & Harwick (2004). These targets are identified by Barki & Hartwick (2004) as the task which is an indication of task conflict; the task process which is indicative of process conflict and the interpersonal relationship which indicates relationship conflict.

A fourth type of intragroup conflict has been identified more recently in the literature and is referred to as status conflict (Bendersky & Hay, 2012). This type of conflict is conflict over one's relative status within the group. It is the combination of the distinctive features of this conflict that differentiates it from the other three types of conflict. These features are that this type of conflict is motivated by a desire to defend or elevate one's relative status position within the group; it is a zero sum conflict since status is a social resource and a specific status position is viewed as a fixed amount of that social resource which can be gained or lost; and this conflict often involves alliances among group members which validates the various status positions (Bendersky & Hay, 2012).

Effect and Interrelation of the types of intragroup conflict. The existence of conflict within groups can lead to both positive and negative effects and is dependent on the type of conflict as well as any interrelationship that may exist between the types of conflict. Task conflict has been found to have the least negative effect of the types of conflict (de Wit et al., 2012). There are studies which reveal that task conflict can have positive effect on group effectiveness and performance when effectively managed and can enrich understanding, increase creativity and lead to successful decision making (Chun & Choi, 2014; De Dreu, 2006; de Wit et al., 2012). Task conflict can also positively impact collaboration (Amason, 1996; Jehn, 1997; Jehn & Mannix, 2001; Pelled, 1996).

Research indicate that process conflict has a negative effect on member satisfaction and group effectiveness (Belfar, Mannix, Peterson & Trochim, 2011; Greer et al., 2008; Jehn, 1997). Additionally, it can have a lasting negative impact on group collaboration if not managed at the beginning (Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Relationship conflict was also found to negatively impact group performance and effectiveness and collaboration especially since the negative emotions engendered shifted the focus from the task requirements to interpersonal issues (Chun & Choi, 2014; De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; Jehn & Mannix, 2001). Status conflict also appears to have a negative effect on group effectiveness and performance particularly when considered in isolation (Chun & Choi, 2014).

While each type of conflict is distinct and has its own distinct impact within a group, there is also interaction and interplay between the various types of conflict. This interrelationship between the various types of intragroup conflict has been studied and the

literature reveals that more than one type of conflict may occur at the same time within a group as well as one type of conflict may evolve into another type of conflict (De Dreu & Weingart, 2003; De Wit et al., 2012). Accordingly, it was found that although task conflict generally had a positive effect on group performance and collaboration, when not resolved, it very often evolved into relationship conflict which then had a negative impact on group process and outcomes (Behfar et al., 2011; De Dreu & Weingert, 2003; Pelled et al., 1999). Process conflict occurring early during a group's interaction was also found to be likely to develop into relationship conflict in the group's subsequent interaction with the associated negative emotions (Greer et al., 2008). Additionally, the literature reveals that the benefits of task conflict on group process and outcomes are lost when there is also status conflict because the focus shifts from the task to competing for or defending status (Bendersky & Hays, 2012).

Conflict Moderators. The effect of intragroup conflict on group effectiveness and interrelationship of the types of conflict have led to a focus on conflict moderators and those factors that moderate the effect of the conflict and prevent conflict transformation. Several conflict moderators have been identified and include social skills (Lee et al., 2015), intragroup trust (Simons & Peterson, 2000), conflict management approaches (DeChurch et al., 2007), collective team identification and team member alignment (Schaeffner, Huettermann, Gerbert, Boerner, Kearne & Song, 2015), emotion regulation (Ayoko, Callan & Hartel, 2008). Other conflict moderators highlighted in the literature were cognitions, attitudes, values and motivations of the group referred to as emergent states which have been found to be mediating mechanisms (Jehn, Greer, Levine

& Szulanski, 2008; Marks, Mathieu &, 2001). These include respect, trust and cohesion (Mannix & Jehn, 2004).

Summary

The literature reveals the increasing need for students in higher education to be equipped with the requisite skills to work effectively with others when they go out into the workplace. Incorporating group work into the curriculum is one of the way in which educators seek to facilitate the learning of such skills and the benefits of group work as a pedagogical tool is well documented in the literature. Notwithstanding these benefits, numerous challenges with group work can also be found in the literature. These challenges contribute significantly to group work becoming a breeding ground for intragroup conflict. Consequently, many students have been found to have negative perceptions and experience negative emotions about group work.

Examining intragroup conflict through the lens of group development theory helped to provide an understanding of the intragroup processes and dynamics that may occur during the conflict. The theories of Bennis & Shepherd (1956), Bion (191) and Tuckman (1965) were explored in particular, and they all underscored that intragroup conflict is an integral part of a group's development. Using group development theory also allowed for a consideration of some of the factors which contributed to the conflict and several were unearth including anxiety, uncertainty and interpersonal issues.

The two-dimensional framework of interpersonal conflict presented by Barki and Hartwick (2004) was also utilized to explore the nature of intragroup conflict from an interpersonal level since intragroup conflict involved interpersonal process. This first dimension of this framework identified fundamental cognitive, affective and behavioral

elements of conflict underscored the significance of the perceptions, perspectives and feelings of group members when considering conflict which is in line with the phenomenological approach to be adopted in this study. The second dimension of the framework distinguished the properties of the conflict from the targets and facilitated a consideration about what the conflict among students involved. These targets are consistent with three types of intragroup conflict revealed in intragroup conflict theory and the literature on intragroup conflict - task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict.

Intragroup theory and the literature on intragroup conflict bring enlightenment to the phenomenon of intragroup conflict by highlighting the antecedents of intragroup, the types of intragroup conflict, the effect of intragroup conflict on the group outcomes and conflict moderators. In particular, intragroup conflict theory emphasizes the possible serious negative effects that can arise as a result of intragroup conflict that is not managed and the need to gain insight into the phenomenon so as to mediate the effects of the conflict.

There is a wealth of empirical studies on intragroup conflict and group work. These studies assist in providing an understanding of the nature of intragroup conflict and the various group processes, group dynamics, interrelations and the general impact of intragroup conflict on group outcomes. However, a review of the literature reveals the paucity of research into the subjective lived experiences of those who experience the conflict whether in an organizational or educational setting. Therefore, this phenomenological study seeks to fill that gap by providing a detailed description of the perspectives, perceptions and experiential concerns of students in higher education who

have experienced intragroup conflict so as to gain an in-depth understanding of those

experiences.

Chapter 3: Methodology

Introduction

The major purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of students in tertiary education experiencing intragroup conflict as they engage in group projects and to understand how they make sense of this experience in the face of the intragroup conflict. I aimed to provide a description of their perspectives and experiential concerns in light of the intragroup conflict. As such, to conduct this study, a qualitative research methodology was utilized, using a phenomenological approach. In particular, I used interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA) to describe the lived experiences of students and the meanings that they find in those experiences in the midst of the intragroup conflict. IPA is very suitable in addressing the research questions since it is a qualitative approach that allows insight into how people make sense of their life experiences (Smith et al., 2012).

Qualitative Research Methodology

A qualitative research methodology is 'a broad approach to the study of social phenomena' (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 3). It is inductive in that it seeks to explore or understand a social or human problem rather than generate hypotheses that are tested (Creswell, 2013). It does not employ statistical measures or quantification (Strauss & Corbin, 1990).   It is one that is 'exploratory or descriptive, that accepts the value of context and setting and that searches for a deeper understanding of the participants' lived experience of the phenomenon under study (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 102). Through the use of this methodology one is able to explore and understand meaning making by individuals or groups to a social or human problem (Creswell, 2013).

Accordingly, qualitative research is "pragmatic, interpretative and grounded in the lived experiences of people" (Marshall & Rossman, 2016, p. 2).

A qualitative approach was appropriate for my study because the main characteristics of qualitative research allowed me to achieve my research objectives. Through this approach, I was able to explore the lived experiences of Caribbean students in higher education who experienced intragroup conflict as they engaged in group work and so gained an in-depth understanding of their experiences. I was able to employ an inductive approach in which I was open-minded from the commencement of my study and was able to gain an understanding from an exploratory study rather than from testing or confirming hypotheses.

Additionally, a qualitative approach enabled me to interact with the participants in a manner which gave value to the context and natural setting of the participants. In this way, I was able to gain insight and describe how the participants understood and made sense of their subjective experiences. This approach allowed the participants to share their stories, beliefs and their perspectives about their experiences with the phenomenon of intragroup conflict in a manner that could not have been effectively be attained with a deductive approach using hypotheses and statistical measures (Marshall & Rossman, 2016).

Phenomenology

Qualitative research methodology is very broad and consists of several typologies which are recognized by qualitative methodologists (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenology is one of the major typologies that has been identified (Creswell, 2013; Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Phenomenology is a research methodology with roots in a

philosophy and one that seeks to describe what 'one perceives, senses, and knows in one's immediate awareness and experience'. (Moustakas, 1994, p. 26). That philosophy is focused on the human experience and the manner in which we perceive things through such experience (Sokolowski, 2000).

As a research methodology, phenomenology is concerned with the lived experience of individuals of a phenomenon and the common meaning for those individuals of that experience as they experience the phenomenon (Cooper, 2014; Creswell, 2013). That "lived experience" involves the immediate, pre-reflective awareness of the experience of the phenomenon (van Manen, 1998). Phenomenology aims to provide a description of the individuals' lived experience of the phenomenon and what that experience means to them by reducing the individual experience to a description of what is common to all the participants as they experience the phenomenon (Cooper, 2014; Creswell, 2013; van Manen, 1998). According to Moustakas (1994) "phenomenology is committed to description of experiences" (p. 58). The objective of phenomenology to provide description of lived experiences and the meaning making of them is achieved by "a process of reflectively appropriating, of clarifying, and of making explicit the structure of meaning of the lived experience" (Van Manen, 1998, p. 77).

There are several phenomenological approaches or phenomenological models including transcendental phenomenology, existential phenomenology and interpretative phenomenological analysis (Cooper, 2014). However, there are unifying characteristics of all these phenomenological approaches used by phenomenologists and these have been identified to include a focus an individual lived experience and the meaning assigned by

that individual to that experience; an open-mindedness that facilitates understanding and reflection; and a clear methodological structure (Cooper, 2014).

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

The phenomenological approach adopted for this study was IPA. This approach is concerned with understanding how individuals experience and relate to a phenomenon in their personal and social world and from their perspective and on their own terms (Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2012). The objective of IPA is to capture and provide rich and detailed description of the way in which individuals view and experience a particular phenomenon. This is achieved by obtaining insight into individual's world.

IPA is informed by and encompasses three theoretical perspectives, namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics and idiography (Smith et al, 2012). The phenomenology aspect is reflected in IPA's focus on the lived experience of participants of a phenomenon and their meaning making of that experience. IPA is committed to providing a description of the experience and is interested in the perceptions and reflections of participants towards the particular phenomenon (Smith et al., 2012).

Hermeneutics, another major element of IPA, is a theory of interpretation. IPA emphasizes the process of interpretation that is involved in a participant's lived experience of a phenomenon. It also underscores researchers exploring and accessing the lived experience of participants of a phenomenon and the meaning assigned by those participants to that experience. It recognizes that as individuals experience a phenomenon perceived by them to be significant, it engages their thoughts and feelings and they reflect considerably on that experience that has been lived through (Smith et al., 2012; van Manen, 1998). As the participants reflect on the significance of the experience lived

through, they assign meaning to the phenomenon through a process of interpretation. According to van Manen (1998), 'lived experiences gather hermeneutics significance as we (reflectively) gather them by giving memory to them. Through meditations, conversations, day dreams, inspirations and other interpretive acts we assign meaning to the phenomena of lived life' (p. 37).

It is the reflections of the participants as they experience the phenomenon and assign meaning to the phenomenon that are of interest to a researcher using IPA (Smith et al., 2012). As the researcher seeks to engage these reflections so as to understand and make sense of the personal experience of the participants, the IPA approach acknowledges that he or she also will be involved in a process of interpretation and will be influenced by his or her own assumptions, conceptions and experiences. This is noted by van Manen (1998) who states that even the "facts of lived experience need to be captured in language (the human science text) and this is inevitably an interpretive process" (p. 181).

Thus, in IPA the researcher engages in what is known as "double hermeneutics" (Smith, 2004, p. 40). According to Smith (2004):

> For IPA, one can say human research involves a double hermeneutic. The
> participant is trying to make sense of their personal and social world; the
> researcher is trying to make sense of the participant trying to make sense of their
> personal and social world. (p.40)

Consequently, IPA requires a great deal of reflection, sensitivity and open-mindedness. This is underscored by van Manen (1998) when he noted that the hermeneutic

phenomenology method "requires an ability to be reflective, insightful, sensitive to language and constantly open to experience" (p. xi).

The third major aspect of IPA is its strong idiographic approach. Idiography stresses the particular rather than the general or the group. It emphasizes depth in detail and so is concerned with a detailed and thorough examination of each case and each participant's experience. Such examination or exploration is only possible with a small research sample. As such, most IPA studies consist of a small number of participants so that the requisite depth in detail can be achieved (Smith, 2004).

IPA was well suited for this study because it allowed me to achieve my research objective. According to Smith and Osborn (2003), "IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how individuals are perceiving the particular situations they are facing, how they are making sense of their personal and social world" (p. 55). The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding into the lived experiences of students in higher education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. I sought to gain insight into how these students understand and make sense of their experiences in the face of the intragroup conflict. The aim was to provide a detailed description of their perspectives and experiential concerns in light of the conflict so as to give voice to what they are experiencing.

Thus, IPA's phenomenological aspect which emphasizes the lived experience of the participants and the meaning assigned to that experience by the participants, allowed me to focus on the lived experience of intragroup conflict by students who are assigned group work and to gain insight as to what it is like from their perspective and what that experience means for them. This is important particularly because experiences of

conflict, including intragroup conflict, can have a considerable impact and hold significant meaning for individuals who experience such conflict. Therefore, it is important to delve into that experience from the perspective of those experiencing the conflict. As noted by Cooper (2014):

> As a relatively young field, there remains so much to understand about various conflict experiences, about the experiences of those seeking to resolve conflict and about peacebuilding efforts. In addition, experiences related to conflict and conflict resolution are particularly impactful and meaningful for those involved in them. Phenomenology is an ideal methodology for gaining knowledge about those experiences and what meaning they hold. (p. 71)

In addition, I felt that the voice of students, particularly Caribbean students, with respect intragroup conflict was not sufficiently represented in the literature. In fact, I was unable to find another study which applied IPA to the topic of intragroup conflict among students and which allowed for an in-depth exploration and understanding of the student's subjective experience. IPA allowed the participants who experience such conflict, to express their personal experience, their perspectives, perceptions and understandings in their own terms and contexts and so facilitated the amplification of their subjective experiences and their meaning making. It gave value to the reflections and interpretations of the participants of their experiences of intragroup conflict and allowed for reflection and open-mindedness on my part as the researcher through its hermeneutic aspect.

Further, IPA, through its idiographic approach, allowed me to focus on a small research sample as my aim was not to generalize about the larger population. This

approach facilitated a more in-depth exploration of each individual experience and supported my goal of providing a detailed description of the perspectives and experiential concerns of the participants in light of the conflict. Such an approach enriched our understanding of the experience of intragroup conflict among the participants as they engage in group work.

Sampling

Moustakas (1994) posits that there are some essential criteria in relation to the selection of research participants when conducting a phenomenological study. These include the research participant having experienced the phenomenon, being intensely interested in understanding the meaning and nature of the phenomenon, being willing to participate in the interview process and to give consent to the researcher to record the interview and publish the data in a dissertation or other publications. All of these criteria were included when locating and selecting research participants for this study.

A total of nine participants were selected for this study. The sample size was small because of IPA's idiographic approach (Smith, et al., 2012) and its commitment to a detailed interpretation and "painstaking analysis" of each case (Smith & Osborn, 2008 p. 56). Participants were recruited by purposive selection so as to ensure a homogenous sample of participants who would have been be able to provide insight into the experience that I was seeking to explore (Smith, et al., 2012). According to Patton (1990):

> The logic and power of purposeful sampling lies in selecting *information-rich* cases for study in-depth. Information-rich cases are those from which one can

learn a great deal about issues of central importance to the purpose of the

research. (p. 169)

My strategy was to select a small homogenous sample that can be a rich source of

data to obtain in-depth information about the experience of intragroup conflict by

Caribbean students in higher education who have engaged in group projects. This

informed my inclusion criterion for the sample. The criteria for choosing participants

were the participant being an English-speaking student (a) from a Caribbean island

currently seeking a degree in the ROTT, and (b) who has engaged in at least one group

project for grading in the degree program being sought, and (c) who has experienced or is

experiencing intragroup conflict while engaging in the group project.

I recruited participants by sending out recruitment letters, by referrals and by

opportunities provided as a result of my own contacts. Potential participants from those

who expressed an interest in the study were screened. This was done by conducting a

brief survey to ensure that there was homogeneity in relation to what was perceived as

intragroup conflict since my aim was to recruit participants for whom the topic under

study would be relevant and of personal significance (Moustakas, 1994).

In order to make certain that the potential participants had experienced the

phenomenon under study, I utilized the first dimension of the two dimensional

framework provided by Barki and Harwick (2004) to inform the questions in my

screening survey to confirm that the attributes or properties generally associated with

interpersonal conflict situations were all present during their experience of the

phenomenon. I wanted to ensure that the participants experienced the simultaneous

presence of disagreement or dissonance within their groups, behavior perceived to

interfere with the group process and negative emotions (Barki and Harwick, 2004). In

particular, my concern was with those potential participants who experienced negative

emotions during the conflict and with understanding what were their lived experiences

and experiential concerns.

The participants represented various disciplines including agriculture, law,

medicine and business. They were all given pseudonyms by which they would be referred

for the purpose of this study. Table 1 presents demographic information on the

participants of this study.

Table 1

Demographic Information on the Participants

Participant #	Pseudonym	Gender	Age	Country of nationality	Level of higher education
1	Avril	Female	25	Dominica	Bachelor's degree
2	Barbara	Female	28	British Virgin Island	Bachelor's degree
3	Christine	Female	28	Guyana	Professional certification
4	Debra	Female	22	Guyana	Professional certification
5	Erica	Female	55	Trinidad and Tobago	Professional certification
6	Frank	Male	30	Bahamas	Bachelor's degree
7	Gary	Male	35	St. Kitts	Bachelor's degree
8	Hannah	Female	20	Trinidad and Tobago	Bachelor's degree
9	Irene	Female	25	Trinidad and Tobago	Master's degree

Bracketing

As a researcher conducting a phenomenological study, I was mindful of the need

to have a level of open-mindedness when collecting the data. Accordingly, after having

selected my sample and prior to the preparation of my questions for interviewing, I

engaged in "bracketing" to address any pre-conceived notions, perceptions and biases

that I may have had with respect to intragroup conflict and the participants (Smith, et al., 2012). This process was important in this study because according to van Manen (1998):

> The problem of phenomenological inquiry is that "our 'common sense', pre-understandings, our suppositions, assumptions, and existing bodies of scientific knowledge, predispose us to interpret the nature of phenomenon before we have even come to grips with the significance of the phenomenological question" (p. 46).

Bracketing is the process of first taking "hold of the phenomenon" and then placing the knowledge that one has about that phenomenon outside of that phenomenon; the process of suspending or bracketing the beliefs, understanding and knowledge that we have of the phenomenon (Van Manen, 1998 p. 47). It is significant because our beliefs, understanding and knowledge cannot simply be forgotten or ignored but rather must be acknowledged and held at bay (Van Manen, 1998). As stated by van Manen, (1998):

> If we simply try to forget or ignore what we already "know" we may find that the presuppositions' persistently creep back into our reflections. It is better to make explicit our understandings, beliefs, biases, assumptions, presuppositions, and theories. We try to come to terms with our assumptions, not in order to forget them again, but rather to hold them deliberately at bay and even to turn this knowledge against itself, as it were, thereby exposing its shallow or concealing character. (p. 47)

The process of bracketing is reflected in what Moustakas (1994) refers to as Epoche, a Greek word describing the process of "setting aside predilections, prejudices, predispositions, and allowing things, events, and people to enter anew into consciousness,

and to look and see them again, as if for the first time" (p.85). This process allows me an 'original vantage point' to study the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994 p. 86).

Cooper (2014) posits writing a "bracketing statement" as one of the ways of making explicit our beliefs, understanding and knowledge (p. 80) and of bracketing our own experiences from those of the participants (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). Accordingly, I wrote a bracketing statement which detailed my own experience with the phenomenon of intragroup conflict so as to bracket off my experiences from those of my research participants. In my bracketing statement, I was able to bring to mind my own experiences with intragroup conflict. One memory that surfaced was in respect of my job as a Course Director and having to speak to students in a group who were encountering intragroup conflict and were very frustrated to be in that group. Another significant memory that appeared was being a part of a group as a master's student where I recall that there was intragroup conflict within my group as a result of group members not contributing sufficiently to the task. This intragroup conflict was accompanied by an intensity of negative emotions within the group. Through this bracketing process, I was able to acknowledge these and other experiences with the phenomenon of intragroup conflict with a view of bracketing or setting aside those experiences from those of the participants of my study to achieve an 'original vantage point' to study the phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994 p. 86).

Data Collection

Data was collected from conducting in-depth individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. This is the method often used in phenomenological studies to collect data (Moustakas, 1994). The use of interviews to collect data was a very

suitable method of data collection for my study because through its use, I was able to

learn about the perceptions, interpretations, thoughts and feelings of the participants in

relation to intragroup conflict (Weiss, 1994). According to Weiss (1994), through the use

of interviews, we can learn "about people's interior experiences. We can learn what

people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions. We can learn how events

affected their thoughts and feelings" (p. 1).

Additionally, the use of semi-structured interviewing in phenomenological studies

facilitates dialogue between the researcher and participants while allowing the researcher

to "capture the deep meaning of the experience in the participants' own words" (Marshall

& Rossman, 2016, p.102). Smith & Osborn (2008) indicate that "this form of

interviewing allows the researcher and the participant to engage in a dialogue whereby

initial questions are modified in the light of the participants' responses and the

investigator is able to probe interesting and important areas which arise" (p.57). This

method of interviewing allowed for greater flexibility in exploring the phenomenon

enabling the production of richer data from the participants (Smith & Osborn, 2008).

Accordingly, I developed a schedule for the interview as a guide so as to allow for

smooth and easy interaction with the participants (Smith, et al., 2012). The importance of

preparing an interview schedule prior to conducting the interview is highlighted by Smith

& Osborn (2008) who state:

> Producing a schedule beforehand forces us to think explicitly about what we
>
> think/hope the interview might cover. More specifically, it enables us to think of
>
> difficulties that might be encountered, for example, in terms of question wording
>
> or sensitive areas, and to give some thought to how these difficulties might be

handled. Having thought in advance about the different ways the interview may proceed allows us, when it comes to the interview itself, to concentrate more thoroughly and more confidently on what the respondent is actually saying. (p. 59)

My strategy was to build a positive rapport with the participants by ensuring the interview process was informal and interactive (Moustakas, 1994). Therefore, each interview was conversational with a view to gathering 'lived-experience material' while providing an opportunity for reflection by the participants (van Manen, 1998 p. 63). My questions were not too explicit in that they were constructed so as to provide 'a gently nudge' and encouragement to the participant to share about their experiences about intragroup conflict rather than pushing or leading them too much (Smith & Osborn, 2008, p. 61).

Consequently, my questions were open-ended questions aimed at obtaining data that can provide a rich and in-depth understanding of the lived experience from the perspective of the participants and at exploring the meaning of the lived experience for the participants. For example, my initial question was: "What has it been like for you to work in groups while doing group projects?" and then I specifically asked about conflict that the participant has experienced while doing group projects. Based on the responses of the participants, there were follow up questions such as:

1. What were you feeling as you experienced this conflict?

2. What were your feelings towards the other group members? What was it like to be a part of the group during this conflict?

3. How were you feeling about yourself?

4. What were your thoughts during this experience?

5. How did you cope with the conflict?

6. In what ways were you affected by the conflict?

7. What were your concerns during this experience?

8. Were there any specific things that were important for you during this experience?

9. What was the most difficult part of this experience for you?

10. What would have been most helpful to you during this experience?

Each interview was face-to-face with the participant and was approximately 60-90 minutes in length. Each interview was audio- recorded with the permission of the participants (Moustakas, 1994) and was then transcribed by me. Smith and Osborn (2008) underscore the significance of having the interview audio-recorded when conducting interview in an IPA study when they state:

> Our view is that it is not possible to do the form of interviewing required for IPA without tape recording. If one attempts to write down everything the participant is saying during the interview, one will only capture the gist, missing important nuances. It will also interfere with helping the interview to run smoothly and with establishing rapport. (p.64).

Data Analysis

Data analysis in IPA is a flexible, dynamic, multi-directional and iterative process (Smith et al., 2012). Accordingly, Smith et al. (2012) state:

> In reality, analysis is an iterative process of fluid description and engagement with the transcript. It involves flexible thinking, processes of reduction, expansion,

revision, creativity and innovation. Overall, the analytic process is multi-

directional; there is a constant shift between different analytic processes. (p. 81)

As such, I acknowledge that there is no single prescribed method of data analysis

in IPA (Smith et al., 2012). However, I have found the data analysis framework provided

by Smith et al. (2012), to be quite useful as a guide in analyzing the data collected from

the interviews with the participants and adopted this framework of data analysis in my

study.

In analyzing the data collected in my study, my focus was on the lived

experiences of participants and how they have made sense of their experiences (Smith et

al., 2012). The data from the interviews were transcribed verbatim by me and analyzed

for significant statements and descriptions about their lived experiences. Using the

framework of analysis promulgated by Smith et al. (2012), the data analysis in my study

consisted of six stages.

Reading and re-reading of the transcript. The first stage of my analysis of the

data was to read and re-read the transcript of the interview with the participant to become

familiar with the participant's account and to allow for immersion in the data. According

to Smith et al. (2012), 'to begin the process of entering into the participant's world it is

important to enter into a phase of active engagement with the data' (p. 82). This stage

was important because it ensured that the participants were the focus of the analysis since

it was their subjective experiences and sense making that I was exploring and seeking to

describe. Since the transcription process involved reviewing the interview audio

recordings for accuracy upon completion of a transcript, this process also proved useful

as an initial stage in the reading and re-reading of the transcript. Additionally, as

recommended by Smith et al. (2012), to facilitate a more comprehensive analysis, I listened to the audio recording of the interview after the first reading of the transcript so that I could picture the voice of the participant as I engaged in the re-reading of the transcript. I re-read each transcript at least three times. I found this process of re-reading each transcript and listening to the audio recording of the interview to be quite effective in allowing me to become deeply immersed in the data.

Initial noting. The second stage was the initial noting stage in which I made descriptive, linguistic and conceptual comments (Smith et al., 2012). For each interview transcript, I used colors and the letters 'D', 'L' and 'C' to identify the different types of comments along with the highlight function in Microsoft Word to highlight any relevant text in the color designated. The color yellow and the letter 'D' were used to identify descriptive comments; the color violet and the letter 'L' were used to identify linguistic comments; and the color blue and the letter 'C' were used to identify conceptual comments. The letters 'D', 'L' and 'C' were used at the start of each relevant comment so as to distinguish that type comment from the other comments. I also used the comment function within the review ribbon in Microsoft Word to make the comments (descriptive, linguistic and conceptual) which were inserted in comment boxes in the right margin.

Descriptive comments. I started off by making descriptive comments. When making descriptive comments, I focused on describing the content of the data, looking at key words, phrases, explanations and emotional responses (Smith et al., 2012). In making my comments, I highlighted the relevant text in the transcript in yellow and then used the comment function which allowed me to write my comments in the comment in the right margin. I started my comments with the letter "D" to identify that the comments was a

descriptive comment. An example of this are the sentences, '*And we were like, 'That's not the main issue right now. Our main concern is to get the work done.'* These statements by Gary were made when he shared about an incident of conflict with a group member on whom the group was waiting to begin a task, and who upon arriving sought to address another group member about the manner in which she spoke to her. These sentences along with the surrounding sentences which gave context, were highlighted and a comment stated in the comment box in the right margin as follows: *"D: During the conflict, his main concern along with the other group members, was completing the group work"*. I placed emphasis on these sentences because they were descriptive of Gary's desire with respect to the group task as well as Gary's general approach as well as that of the group towards conflict when there was a task at hand. These sentences and other similar text in Gary's transcript and that of other participants, contributed to the development of one of the thematic findings in the study which was the desire to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict.

  Linguistic comments. After completing the descriptive comments, I then made linguistic comments. With respect to the linguistic comments, my focus was on the participant's use of language to present the content of the data so as to gain insight into the lived world of the participant. I paid particular attention to aspects such as repetition, the use of metaphors, pauses, sighs, voice tonality, volume and laughter. For example, with one participant, Debra, I noted that she sighed at lot as she shared her story. I also paid particular attention to her non-verbal language, pauses and her use of metaphors to gain insight into her lived world. Examples of the linguistic aspects that I captured as Debra shared about her experience with intragroup conflict and my corresponding

linguistic comments are: *"I don't like to talk about [sighs], you know, touchy issues"* *(Debra).* 'L: She sighs as an expression of self-frustration and a sign as to how challenging she finds it is to deal with sensitive issues';'[*Takes a deep breath and sighs]'* *(Debra)* 'L: *She* takes a deep breath and sighs seemingly as a sign of weariness and a manifestation of the difficulty she experiences in expressing and dealing with her vulnerability.**'**; '*[Pause]'(Debra)* ' L: She pauses it seems to manage her emotions and thoughts about her vulnerability.'; *"But during I … [sighs heavily] during it…it's just…it's like you are on a boat and you are just going up and down, up and down, up and down…".(Debra)* **'**L: She uses the metaphor of a boat moving on the water to describe her experience during the conflict as going up and down, being tossed to and fro which seem to signify lack of control and helplessness.' Many of these linguistic elements translated into themes which were reflected in other parts of Debra's transcript as well as in other transcripts such as experiencing difficulty, feeling powerless and inner struggle and turmoil.

Conceptual comments. After completing the linguistic comments, I then moved to making conceptual comments. The making of the conceptual comments was a more interpretative stage of my analysis in which I made comments of a tentative nature as I gained insight into the data and identified possible emerging key concepts (Smith et al., 2012). At this stage, I shifted my focus towards the overarching understanding of the experience of each as a group member experiencing intragroup conflict and how meaning was made of that experience in the midst of the intragroup conflict. The tentative nature of my comments were reflected in the use of the words 'seems' or 'may' and sometimes

the use of questions. So for example, I highlighted the following text of another participant, Erica:

> *I think…this is something that I have to be aware of being an older person too and working in management positions…I mean in my last position, I had like 36 people working under me and I had supervisors, assistant managers. So, to me it's almost a natural thing now to…you tend to see things a certain way and sometimes, you see things that the others don't see. I don't know if it is because of my experience but it can also be a disadvantage because people see you without you even doing anything, they see you in a certain way and…am…she felt that I was…am…controlling [chuckles] the exercise…am but when I sent her stuff, she would refuse it.*

This text in Erica's transcript prompted my conceptual comment as follows: 'C: Is she concerned about how she is perceived by her group members? Why?' The issue of concern about the perception of others was later found to be a significant part of Erica's experience with intragroup conflict as well as the experience of many of the other participants and was eventually developed into one of the subthemes under the thematic finding of identity.

Developing emergent themes. In the third stage, I moved towards the development of emergent themes. I did this by returning to the beginning of the transcript and focusing more on my initial notes or comments while looking for patterns or connections that captured my understanding of the importance of the comments. Smith et al., (2012) describe this process as 'mapping interrelationships, connections and patterns between exploratory notes' (p. 91). I converted my initial notes throughout the transcript

into brief phrases or themes that encapsulated the significance of what was expressed by

the participant in the transcript. I supported the themes developed with data extracts from

the transcripts. In this process, I creating a table in Microsoft Word and inserted the

emergent theme and a number for each emergent theme, line numbers referencing the

location of data extracts from the transcript that supported that theme and comment

numbers referencing the descriptive, linguistic or conceptual comment made in relation to

the data. An example is a section of this table containing emerging themes, the data

extract, their line numbers and the comment number for comments made is provided in

Table 2 below.

Table 2

Section of Table containing emergent themes

No	Emergent Theme	Line#	Comment#	Transcript
1	Tired/Gave up	37	2	*At that point, I was just tired of doing any more work. I just gave up; it was like whatever.*
2	Avoiding conflict/Talking to other group members and not member about conflict issues	41-46	3-9	*Lo and behold when the assignment came back that was the one issue that we had. The one that she changed and it brought us down to a C. At that point, I was like, you know, this is a C, I told another group member, I didn't approach her and that is my issue. I don't really like to engage in conflict.*
3	Consoling oneself but emotions building within	60-65	16-18	*...she didn't sign and so that brought us down to a C again. And we paid for a review. It's so hard to see...you know obviously I didn't expect any better and didn't even open the letter to see what they said. I mean it is obvious. I would have given me a C. So at that point I was like, okay this is like the last assignment I have with her so it's fine whatever. But it's building up in me. It's just like...it's like why can't you just do what you are supposed to do.*
4	Disappointment in self/Self Image/Identity	66-67	20	*I: What was building up in you?* *P: It was a disappointment basically in myself for not pushing earlier to ensure that I get what I deserve.*

table continues

5	Vulnerability when engaging in conflict	70-71	22	*I don't like to engage in conflict because well, I…I'm really not sure why. But I don't like to [long pause], I guess it's, it's a bit vulnerable for me. I don't deal with that. It's too emotional for me.*
6	Avoiding conflict/Unwilling to engage in conflict	70-75	23-25	*I don't like to engage in conflict because well, I…I'm really not sure why. But I don't like to [long pause], I guess it's, it's a bit vulnerable for me. I don't deal with that. It's too emotional for me.*
7	Uncomfortable with sensitive issues/Not wanting to offend	77-81	29-30	*I don't like to talk about [sighs], you know, touchy issues. I don't…and even if it's about work. Like if…if it's going to attack your capabilities, I'd rather not tell you that. I'd rather not tell you, you know, you're not cutting it. I wouldn't want to tell a person that.*
8	Angry at group member's actions	81-85	36-40	*I was mad that you know, you are doing stupidness and you're making the same mistake that caused you to repeat. You're…I mean I saw everything around you. You're not coming to class. You are showing up whenever you have to. You're just laid back and all of this and you expect to pass? It was like…I was just…I was just angry.*

Exploring connections across the emergent themes. In the fourth stage, I sought to explore connections across the emergent themes that were developed. The aim was to find a way to connect the emergent themes in a structured manner so as to highlight the most interesting and significant parts of what had been shared by the research participants (Smith et al., 2012). I did this by listing all the emergent themes from the participant's transcript on a sheet of paper in the sequence in which they arose in the transcript. I then looked for connections between the themes and clustered themes together based on common meanings.

I repeated the above four stages of analysis for each participant. In repeating the four stages of analysis for each participant, it was important that I stayed committed to the idiographic aspect of IPA and treated each participant on his or her individual terms. As such, I was mindful of the recommendation of Smith et al. (2012) that while conducting the analysis of other participants, there should be a level of bracketing in

relation to the ideas that would have emerged from the previous analysis of a participant's account. Finally, I explored patterns and connections across the accounts of all the participants and generated seven master themes from my data analysis. These seven master themes are described in detail in Chapter 4 of this study.

Ethical Considerations

For a qualitative researcher, ethical considerations span the entire research process from the design of the research to the publication of the results of the research. Ethical considerations are critical in qualitative research because the nature of the research involves the study of social and human problems and close interaction with human participants in their everyday environments from whom or about whom data is collected (Creswell, 2013; Orb, Eisenhauer & Wynaden, 2001). This data form the basis of information which is placed in the public domain when results are published for the benefit of others. Consequently, ethical concerns arise in relation to the possible harm that can occur to the participants from conducting the research and publishing the results of the research.

In this regard, it is essential to apply ethical principles in qualitative research to prevent or minimize the risk of possible harm to the participants involved in the research. Three basic ethical principles for research with human participants are outlined in the Report of the National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research (1979) ("The Belmont Report") which form the basis for many ethical considerations and requirements. These principles are respect of persons which entails treating individuals as autonomous agents and protecting those with diminished autonomy; beneficence which relates to securing the well-being of persons; and justice

which speaks to the fair distribution of the burdens and benefits of research (The Belmont Report, 1979). The ethical principles and guidelines stated in The Belmont Report (1979) provide the framework for the Public Welfare Protection of Human Subjects Regulations (2009) which also deals with the protection of human participants.

Accordingly, as a qualitative researcher, I was mindful that I needed to be thorough in the design of my research and to consider the level of risk of the study for the participants as well as issues of privacy and confidentiality and ethical requirements in relation to the selection of participants. Accordingly, I ensured that I obtained the relevant approval from the Institutional Review Board to conduct the study as this Board provided an independent assessment in relation to possible risks of my study. I also made certain that my procedures for selection accorded with the principle of justice outlined in the Belmont Report (1979) in that it was fair and ethical.

In the process of data collection, ethical issues were operating in my mind since according to Smith et al. (2012) such issues have to be monitored at this stage as well as throughout the data analysis stage. The consent process is very important and a qualitative researcher has to be aware of all it entails and design the research so as to ensure that the standards required for informed consent are met. The consent process entails three major elements: the proper disclosure of sufficient information including the nature of the research and any risks involved; ensuring that the participants comprehend the information provided in relation to the research; and that the agreement to participate in research was done voluntarily, free from coercion and undue influence (The Belmont Report, 1979).

In this study, I ensured that I obtained the informed written consent of all the participants consistent with the consent process outlined in the Belmont Report (1979). In relation to the issues of privacy and confidentiality, the data collected were kept on a password protected flash drive and computer. The flash drive was placed in a locked drawer when not in use and in the publication of the results of the research, only pseudonyms were used. Also, all the material in relation to the study will be kept for a period of three years from the date of this study after which all documents will be shredded and digital recordings and files erased.

Chapter 4: Results

An interpretative phenomenological analysis of the data collection from the nine

semi-structured interviews resulted in the emergence of seven master themes. These

master themes which are set out in Table 3 below are as follows:

1. Negative interactions with resultant concern

2. Difficulty and injustice without desired assistance

3. Desiring to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict

4. Feeling powerless and wanting to give up or giving up

5. Negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions

6. Coping with the conflict: avoiding and not engaging

7. Identity: Who I am and who I am to others

In this chapter, these master themes and their subthemes are presented. These themes are

illustrated with the use of verbatim extracts from the interviews of the participants. The

themes are a reflection of the participants' interpretation of the experience of the

participants, as expressed in the data, as well as my interpretation of what the participants

presented in the data (Smith et al., 2009).

Table 3

Master Themes and Related Subthemes

Master Themes	Subthemes
NEGATIVE INTERACTIONS WITH RESULTANT CONCERN	Negative communication
	Alienation
	Concern about relations
DIFFICULTY AND INJUSTICE WITHOUT DESIRED ASSISTANCE	Experiencing difficulty
	Injustice
	Lack of desired assistance
	Wanting to do well and prioritizing the grade
	Taking the actions related to the task personally

table continues

DESIRING TO FOCUS ON THE TASK, PERFORM WELL AND NOT BE DISTRACTED BY THE CONFLIC	Task versus conflict: wanting to focus on the task and not the conflict
FEELING POWERLESS AND WANTING TO GIVE UP OR GIVING UP	Feeling powerless or not in control
	Wanting to give up or giving up
NEGATIVE EMOTIONS, ATTITUDES AND PERCEPTIONS	Negative emotions
	Negative perceptions and attitudes towards group work or group members
COPING WITH THE CONFLICT: AVOIDING AND NOT ENGAGING	
IDENTITY AND PERCEPTION: WHO I AM AND WHO I AM TO OTHERS	Self-awareness and self-perception
	Struggle within self: Inner conflict and turmoil
	Concern about the perception of others

Master Theme One: Negative interactions with resultant concern

This master theme highlights the negative interactions described by all of the participants as part of their experience during, and as a result of, the conflict. It also describes the resultant concern that was expressed by all of the participants about relations. The subthemes of this master theme are negative communication, alienation and concern about relations with group members.

Negative communication. The subtheme describes the negative communication that formed part of the negative interactions that were a part of the experience all of the participants. All the participants in their accounts shared about experiencing negative communication during the conflict. Negative communication in this subtheme describes participants' experience with non-existent, lack or failure to communicate, poor or difficult communication as well as communication of negative emotions or attitudes.

Negative communication was also quite evident in Christine's account when she shared that as a result of the conflict, there were members in her group who were not speaking to her and to whom she was not speaking. She stated, *"So we don't talk to each other."* Frank shared having a similar experience in his group when he was asked about

the interaction among the group members during the conflict. He stated, "*We don't really speak*". Negative communication was also displayed when one participant, Erica, described being ignored by all the members of her group when she made efforts to communicate suggestions for their group work. The negative communication was illustrated by the words she used to describe the response of the group members. She said, "*Nothing happened. Nobody listened to me" and "nobody said anything*".

Negative communication also manifested in the account of Hannah when she shared about the poor communication that existed in her group during the conflict. She indicated that the group *"didn't communicate well because there was a lot of misunderstanding and miscommunication".* It was also apparent when Barbara recounted how difficult communicating became within the group as a result of the conflict. She stated, *"It made communicating difficult".*

Some participants actually engaged in the negative communication by either choosing to stop or to limit communication with their group members. This occurred with Christine who stated, '…*as a result of the first assignment, we weren't talking. The other members and I, we weren't, you know, having conversation. We usually communicate by Facebook or through another group member."* As a result of the conflict, Christine was not on speaking terms with all but one group member and therefore chose to communicate directly only with this one group member to the exclusion of other group members . Christine limited her communication with those members to indirect communication through social media. She seemed to have wanted to avoid any face to face interaction with her group members because of the conflict. Similarly, Debra shared about shutting herself off from communicating with a group member with whom she was

in conflict saying: "*I'm looking at you, I'm hearing you but I am not listening because I have already shut you off from what you did… I'm not going to listen to you at all."* Debra, like Christine therefore, chose to stop communicating or limited communication with the group member with whom she was in conflict.

Participants also shared about experiencing negative non-verbal communication through the body language of their group members. Such interaction was revealed in the account of Christine when she said of her group members with whom she was in conflict:

> *…they were like, you know, have all these antics when they see you, like 'cut up their eyes' and you know, and all these different kind of body languages… And I know it is as a result of the assignment. That's the only reason we are not talking.*

Christine went on to say that the group members' *would roll their eyes at you and you know, like walk and fling themselves, like you know, they kind of like whatever, those kind of attitudes'.* Christine understood the non-verbal communication to be communicating negative emotions and attitudes towards her. She stated, "*You know when persons, when we see each other, I will get all sort of, you know, negative emotions and actions and all these different things".* Erica was found to have encountered similar negative non-verbal communication when she described the response of one of her group members to her contributions during meeting saying, *"…every time I said something, you could see the person's…am…body language that they are repulsed at it."*

The negative communication impacted the participants in different ways. It caused many of the participants to feel uncomfortable within their groups. Barbara indicated that "*It was very awkward and it was difficult"* to be a part of the group at this time. Christine described it as *"uncomfortable".* Gary talked about no longer being able

to relate to and communicate with a group member with whom he had previously become close:

> *P: So we kind of came…we kind of became close … And then it come…it came*
> *…a point where I didn't feel the need to talk to her as I used to relate to her as I*
> *used to, because it was uncomfortable because the only thing we had in common*
> *now was the fact that she wasn't contributing, and I didn't want to discuss that*
> *negative aspect."*

The negative communication also impacted interactions and relations within the group. This is very evident when Irene described the interaction between her group members in a group meeting:

> *"…we were there sitting and she was waiting on the other members … the tension*
> *was…you could see that the other girl she is sitting on the other side on her*
> *phone, just really not interacting with her. She's like away from the conversation*
> *and the group member is there watching her side of the eye, kind of, you just come*
> *here to be on your phone, kind of thing. You're not really having an input. You*
> *could feel the tension there.*

Other participants described such tension existing in their group as a result of the negative communication within the group. Such tension was illustrated also when Frank described not wanting to be around the person with whom there was conflict and relations being strained. He said, *"And I think from a peer relationship point of view, me and that person's relationship is strained. Am…I…you tend not to want to be around that person."* Irene further described her group as being *'very segregated'* as a result of the negative interaction and communication saying further, *"But when you have a group that*

doesn't like each other, can't communicate, the…the…friendship doesn't…you don't

create a friendship. Right, you don't create an acquaintance or a colleague…" This

statement clearly demonstrated what was evident in the accounts of most of the

participants with respect to the adverse impact of negative communication on relations

within the group and with group members.

All of the above extracts demonstrate that negative communication was a notable

part of the negative interactions found to have been experienced by the participants in this

study. Such negative communication was found to have been experienced in the form of

non-communication or lack of communication, poor or difficult communication and non-

verbal actions, which communicated negative emotions and attitudes. The negative

communication seemed to have been clearly understood by each participant who

experienced it as being negative or communicating negative emotions and attitudes

towards them and contributed to participants feeling awkward or uncomfortable or

experiencing strained relations within the group.

Alienation. Another subtheme, which emerged from the data, was alienation.

This subtheme describes the way in which participants were excluded from their group or

the way in which participants alienated themselves or other group members from the

group or the task to be done by the group. This subtheme was found to be part of the

lived experience of seven participants evidencing more of the negative interactions that

were part of the experience of participants. Some participants (Avril, Barbara and Erica)

described feeling alienated within their groups, while others (Christine, Debra and Frank)

actually indicated that they generated, orchestrated or contributed to members of their

group being alienated and one participant, Frank, expressed concern about being alienated from his group.

Avril's experience with alienation was demonstrated when she described how difficult it was to be heard in the group because she was the only one with a different view or interpretation of what was required for the task. She seemed to have felt voiceless in her group when she said:

> "…it's only me and it's…it's… it's five others in the group. It's kind of difficult when you are trying to make your voice be heard and everyone else is saying no and you are saying yes. And at the point you know when you are in a group with six, the majority counts, then you are out."

Avril's feelings of isolation and being excluded were clearly expressed when she said' "*I felt like, you know, I was the odd one out*". Barbara shared about a similar experience, indicating that her views were *'shut down'* by the group leader who was also able to persuade the other group members to *'shut themselves off'* from what she had to say. Erica's experience with alienation came when she noticed that group members had stopped communicating with her and that she was being excluded from activities within her group. She said of her group members, "*I noticed certain people stopped talking to me. And then they had meetings and they won't invite me.*" Erica went on to say, *"I felt alienated from the group"*.

The alienation experienced was found to be a painful emotional experience for some of the participants. This was evident in Barbara's story where the alienation she experienced within her group led to feelings of insignificance, being rejected, belittled and underestimated. Barbara shared, "… *they have completely rejected what I have to say*

or rejected my position, rejected the significance of my contribution and that made me

feel belittled, made me feel inadequate." Barbara in speaking about her contribution

being rejected went on to say, *"...it makes me feel...am...it makes me feel insignificant"*

and *"I felt underestimated".* Erica described how she felt being alienated when she said:

> *"...if you're in a group, you are totally ignored, your contributions are just*
>
> *thrown aside and then you are told that you are too old and you don't have a*
>
> *fresh perspective, what is...what is there?... so, you know...am...I did not want to*
>
> *be in the group anymore. I cried.*

Erica's experience of being alienated created such emotional distress for her to the point

where she no longer wanted to be a part of her group.

While some participants experienced being alienated from their groups by their

group members, one participant, Christine, described deliberately isolating herself from

her group when as a result of the conflict, she no longer wanted to interact with her group

members. She said, *"I got to the point where I even put the group on mute. I blocked*

them. I took them off Facebook. I took them off WhatsApp. I took them off everything."

Other participants actually orchestrated, perpetuated or contributed to members of their

groups being alienated. For example, Debra shared about isolating one of her group

members from the task and possibly from the rest of the group by working more closely

with the other group members. She said, *"I tried working more closely with the other*

members so that she will have the least to do." She also shared about having

conversations with the other group members to the exclusion of the group member and

about encouraging the other group members to not let the group member do certain tasks.

She stated, *"And ... even though it was a little bad, I would tell the other members, 'Look,*

you do not let her do that. Let us do it. You know why'. So I would tell the other members

and they would know."

Alienation was also found to be a part of Gary's experience where he and his

group members worked towards alienating one of his group members, who they felt had

not been contributing, by putting her out of the group. He said, "…*we kind of took*

matters into our own hands and we decided we were going to put her out of the group."

He also tells of his group deciding to hold to its position of excluding the group member

and to not include her name on the assignment saying, "*The end of it was that we decided*

that we were not going to put her name on the…the assignment…." Frank also

contributed to alienating a group member when he and his group chose to exclude her

from group activities and group decision-making because of her non-contribution and

lack of attendance at meetings. This was illustrated when he explained: "…*for future*

assignments, future stuff, we don't care if she is involved. Making decisions, we didn't

care to ask her. We just did it." Interesting, although Frank contributed to the alienation

of one of his group members, not gaining his group's approval and being alienated from

the group were found to be a concern for him. He expressed his concerns when he shared

about gaining his group approval saying, "*And I think as a person being…getting that*

kind of approval is important because then there will always be conflict in a sense that

they won't come to you with things. They will just lock you out."

The above demonstrate that the conflict experience of most of the participants was

marked by alienation. Alienation occurred when participants were excluded, ignored or

their opinions were rejected. The experience of being alienated was found to be a painful,

emotional rollercoaster experience for some of the participants leading to feelings of

sadness, rejection, feeling insignificant, voiceless, underestimated and belittled. Alienation also occurred when one participant chose to isolate herself from her group members as well as when participants either excluded or worked with their group to exclude or alienate group members from the group. In one instance, efforts were made to exclude a group member from the task as well and in another, a participant was concerned that he will not gain his group's approval and would therefore be alienated from the group.

Concern about relations. This subtheme describes the participants' concern about relations with group members which was a central aspect of their experience with intragroup conflict. The negative interactions that pervaded the experience of participants led all nine participants to have concerns about how they would relate to their group members going forward. These concerns were expressed as the participants shared their stories.

There was recognition by participants that the negative interactions as result of the conflict were negatively impacting relations. Irene referred to the negative interactions as 'chaos' and lamented that the *'chaos'* that resulted from the conflict within the group prevented the formation of bonds among group members saying, "*...when you have chaos, you wouldn't be able to form a bond...*" Barbara also shared:

> *It made communicating difficult because I am wondering now well how to bring this across and how to speak with them...because we...we were still in the same class in other classes, so it wasn't as though these were persons that I will only encounter in one class. These were persons that I would have encountered throughout my years of university.*

Barbara's statement reflected the concern about relations of all participants which arose because all of them had to continue interacting with group members in other classes and for other group projects. Accordingly, all were very aware that there would be future interactions with the group members with whom they were in conflict. This often made things uncomfortable for participants, many of whom struggled with how to interact with their group members in a way that would not lead to further negative interactions.

The concern about future interactions and relation made many of the participants cautious in addressing the conflict. This was demonstrated with Barbara indicated that she did not bring the conflict issues to her lecturer's attention because of the concern about future relation and interaction with her group members while at university. Barbara explained in the following excerpt:

> *I have to interact with them…am…in tutorials in law. I have to interact with them, am, during lectures. I have to interact with them …So, it would have been very, very awkward for me to go and bring that to the lecturer's attention and then I would have had to interact with them for two more years in the same class.*

Therefore, it seemed that the concern about relations influenced how participants treated with or addressed the conflict issues within their group. In Barbara's case, it influenced her not to seek intervention from her lecturer.

Other participants were concerned about how the negative interactions would impact relations beyond university life. Such concern was exemplified in the account of Christine when she shared her concern about making 'enemies' of group members that she may need in the future. Similarly, Erica appeared to be concerned about how the conflict may impact her relations with her peers going forward because according to her,

"*Building relationship, I think, is an important strategy in the legal fraternity"*. As a result, she was concerned about the impact on the conflict on her in her career going forward. She stated, *"I am concerned going forward about my career... I want my career in the law fraternity and it's a network. It's a network organization."* Irene also seemed to have been concerned about future relations with group members and her inability to create friendship within the group as a result of the intragroup conflict. She said, "*But when you have a group that doesn't like each other, can't communicate ...you don't create a friendship, right, you don't create an acquaintance or a colleague because you never know, that person may be able to help you somewhere along the line"*. She was also concerned about being in a group which "*tends to break down your ability to get somebody who can probably help you some...at some point in your life*". Irene therefore demonstrated that she perceived the intragroup conflict a hindrance to good relations going forward.

Most of these participants seemed to have understood that beyond university and within their careers, there is a level of interdependence with which they must operate with their peers. They seemed to have perceived the negative interactions that resulted from the conflict as a threat to the relations that will have to exist to allow for this interdependence and therefore had concerns.

Master Theme Two: Difficulty, perceived injustice without desired assistance

In addition to experiencing negative interactions and having concerns as a result, the participants also shared about experiencing difficulty and injustice without getting desired assistance. This was found to be a central aspect of their intragroup experience. This second master theme therefore gives voice to the difficulty or challenges

experienced by the participants during the conflict; the perception by most of the participants of injustice; and the desire for assistance which most participants felt was not available during the conflict.

Experiencing difficulty. The Participants repeatedly used words such as 'challenging', 'hard', 'tough', 'difficult' and 'trouble' to portray the difficulty that they were experiencing during the intragroup conflict. Avril talked about it being difficult trying to have a voice in the group during the conflict. She said, "*It's kind of difficult when you are trying to make your voice be heard and everyone else is saying no and you are saying yes.*" When asked how she coped with the intragroup conflict experience she responded, "*It was hard. I'd be honest, it was…it was tough…*" Erica, used similar words to describe her conflict experience stating that, *"…it's been tough".* Christine found it difficult to deal with the conflict and to let go of the negative emotions she experienced saying, "*It was hard"* and *"letting it go wasn't easy".*

It was also difficult for the participants when there were negative interactions and communication within their group. According to Barbara, *"It was very awkward and it was difficult."* Gary shared that it was *'very hard'* and used the metaphor of a *'tug of war'* to depict the difficulty he experienced when there was conflict within his group. He stated, *"It was like a tug of war, a literal tug of war. The girl pulling one way, they pulling another way and I am left stuck in the middle holding the rope being jock left and right, left and right".* He continued, *"And so it was this constant tug-of-war between them and it was…it was very hard."*

During the conflict, participants also shared about their difficulty dealing with the group dynamics. So for example, Avril shared about finding it challenging and difficult

having to work in a group where persons have different priorities and personalities saying, "*It's a bit challenging at times when persons have different priorities and you know that everything is your priority and it makes it a bit difficult to work with different especially different personalities".* Irene said, *"Group work dynamics is hard"* and Debra used the words *'cook up of trouble'* and the analogy of *'calculus'* in Mathematics to describe having to deal with different personalities and views and to generally describe her experience of difficulty within her group.

The participants also found it difficult to deal with challenging members, in particular members who were not contributing or who were free-riding or did not prioritise the group's task. So for example, Gary talked about it being difficult to complete the group project when there were members who were not contributing saying '*in the process of getting the project done, or trying to get the project done, it is hard when you have dead weight".* Hannah indicated, "…*it was difficult where I had to prepare work that was supposed to be done by someone else and I had to be off other assignments from other courses."*

Therefore, the lived intragroup conflict experience of the participants was found to be marked by difficulty or hardship experienced as a result of the intragroup conflict. The difficulty experienced by all the participants seemed to arise from several sources, including dealing with the conflict itself and the negative interactions that occurred as a result of the conflict and dealing with group members who were free riding or not contributing equally. Some participants also experienced difficulty having to deal with the group dynamics and with their own negative emotions.

Injustice. All of the participants also seemed to have experienced some sense of injustice during their intragroup conflict experience. This sense of injustice was more prevalent however in the account of some of the participants such as Avril, Erica, Frank, Gary, Hannah and Irene. Gary, for example used words such as 'unfairly', 'not fair' and 'unfair' over 20 times and based his assessment of what was occurring during the conflict on what he perceived to have been fair. These were some of his extracts were stated at various points in his account, which are reflective of what other participants also shared, "*I felt people were basically treated unfairly in the group because others were not doing what they were supposed to do…*"; "*…it is not fair for us to do the work and she would get the grade;* "*In all fairness, it is not fair for her to get the grade that we worked so hard for.*"; "*because we were thinking that it's not fair for her to get any part of the grade*"; "*And in all fairness, in order for you to get your degree you have to work for it and if you are not working for it, it is not fair for you to get…am…the grade that the people who work for it would get.*" At one point in his account, Gary expressed that he was angered by what he felt was the unfairness of the situation and stated, "*… I got angry at the girl because I thought it was unfair for you to be basically taking a back seat while the work is getting done.*"

Gary's focus with respect to injustice was mainly about the unfairness of the non-contributing member getting the same grade as the rest of the group. This was reflective of the sense of injustice that many of the other participants expressed. For example, Hannah shared, "*Am…that was all that was on my mind because I was saying it would really be unfair that I did all the work and she got the same grade.*" She also felt it was unjust that she had to do the work of a delinquent group member, while that group

member had time to do other tasks outside the group saying, "*I was just thinking it was really unfair that the other person could have that time to do their other tasks and I myself compromising for them and I had to put myself in the situation.*" Frank's sense of injustice was highlighted in his account when he expressed his frustration with the group leader in not dealing with the group member's action and commented:

…it was like 'When can there be justice implemented? Why can't we just go and tell? Why are you holding up…why you're not telling on this girl? Why you're not asking for help from your Tutor in regard to getting more action or more response from her?

Frank's sense of injustice seemed to have been centred on the non-contributing group member not being held accountable for her actions, and the group's perceived inability to make her accountable.

The participants' sense of injustice was also related to the university that they attended as well as the lecturers who were responsible for the group assignments. This was evident when Avril stated, "*I feel that they [University] need to find another way to grade students whenever you work in a group because it's not fair that I do all the work., they are going to do it anyway'.* She also found it to be '*sad and unfair*' that lecturers did not assist even though they were aware that '*the students are not upholding their weight.*" Irene shared a similar view:

And to me that is unfair where you promoting group work but you…you're rewarding people regardless if they not having any input or anything like that. They're just free lancing basically. They are getting a grade free.

She therefore felt that while the university she attended and the lecturers were promoting group work their grading system was flawed and created an injustice in which non-participating group members were allowed to obtain a grade without input and so get a free grade.

The sense of injustice that the participants felt during their intragroup conflict experience seemed to have been related to the difficulty experienced. It appears to have come from sources such as the inequitable workload and contribution among the group members, grading system, and lack of assistance or intervention by the university whether through lecturers, neutral third parties or a system to promote accountability among group members or to help group members cope with conflict. The lack of assistance or intervention is in itself part of a separate subtheme that was found to be very much a part of the experience of the participants and which is discussed next.

Lack of desired assistance. Throughout the account of all the participants, there was expressed a desire for assistance during the difficulties and challenges they experienced and the injustice they felt they encountered during the conflict. All of the participants, except Christine, felt that assistance was lacking during their intragroup conflict experience. Irene expressed the desire for assistance during the conflict when she explained what it felt like as she experienced stress during the conflict:

> *What it feels like, sometimes you would be…sometimes you would be like in a daze…like you just, this really happening? And then when you catch yourself like, 'Oh my God, I'm running out of time. Who can I…who can I turn to, to help me…to help me through this problem right now.'*

The desire for assistance was also clearly manifested in the account of Avril who expressed that group work was a serious problem saying, "*I personally feel that the University needs to implement a program that teaches students to work with each other. I feel that's a serious problem.*" Avril identified that students had challenges working together and that there was a need for intervention to assist students in this area, suggesting that this intervention could be in the form "*a skill building course or something that allows you to work with somebody*" in the first year of their study. Avril insisted that, "*They need to do something because honestly group work is a serious problem.*" She seemed to have felt that students, including herself, were not able effectively handle intragroup conflict while they did group work and that training, as she suggested, was necessary so as to equip students with the skills that can assist them with effectively working together and dealing with conflict within their groups as they did group work.

Hannah shared a similar sentiment indicating the need for the assistance of tutors to check in to see how groups were functioning as well as to provide training to the students on conflict resolution. Similar to Avril, Hannah seemed to have felt that she and her group members were unable to effectively handle intragroup conflict while they did group work and therefore, she indicated that she saw the need for training in conflict resolution as a means of providing assistance with respect to dealing with intragroup conflict.

Barbara, Erica and Frank all expressed the desire to have the intervention of someone in the midst of the conflict to provide guidance with respect to resolving the conflict or with whom group members can consult during the intragroup conflict

experience. Barbara shared that it would have been most helpful during her intragroup conflict experience to have "*someone there in the midst, someone there to mediate. Someone, perhaps one of, it could have been one of the members. Just someone to say 'Here's what should be done' or 'Here's a better…a better way to look at it'.* While Barbara indicated that this person could have been a group member, she felt that assistance should also have been provided by lecturers saying, "*I think that what will be good is for maybe the lecturers to intervene ever so often."* She felt that since lecturers had authority, their intervention would be meaningful because when they make "*a suggestion, it's taken; students can be more receptive to that, than when they themselves or their peers make a suggestion. They are quicker to reject that. They say, 'Well, we are on the same level, what do you know?"* Barbara expressed that such assistance by the lecturers would assist those who found themselves voiceless in their group saying, "*It will allow them to have a say. Am…it will allow them to have their voices heard or because their voices might be drowned out by louder voices within their own discussions.*

Likewise, Frank saw the need for intervention by a third party and suggested a tutor when asked about what would have been most helpful indicating, "*Intervention by the tutor. Am… [pause] a sit down session maybe where everyone could talk and say how they felt. Say the good, say the bad."* Erica also desired assistance from someone external to the group, according to her, "*like an intervener, a mediator who can come in and speak to the group."* She felt that such intervention would assist those who may feel alienated in their groups and explained, "*You have this external party rather than the group itself trying to resolve the conflicts where they can't. Especially in small groups like that where you may find yourself alienated for no particular reason sometimes."*

Thus, it seems that for Barbara, Frank and Erica assistance in the form of intervention would have supported group deliberation, decision making as well as conflict resolution and would have ensured that all members had a voice and an input in what is eventually produced by the group for grading.

Some of the other participants desired assistance with respect to communicating within their group. This was indicated by Debra when she said, "*I mean if somebody else who is more expressive could have done what I didn't, that would have been helpful.*" Debra desire for assistance during the conflict was for there to have been someone who could have helped her communicate what she felt she was unable to communicate during the conflict. Christine also acknowledged a desire for assistance similar to that expressed by Debra. This assistance Christine felt manifested in the presence of one group member whom she felt functioned as '*a neutral party*'. Christine talked about the ability of this group member to calm things down by communicating '*in a nice way*' and acting as mediator of the group. She shared that this group member was able to communicate in a way she could not and so she '*had no part to play lest the conflict would have, you know, escalated*'. Therefore, Christine felt that this group member was able to assist her in communicating her thoughts and feelings in a way that prevented the escalation of the conflict.

While Christine felt that she was able to attain assistance from her fellow group member, all of the other participants felt that desired assistance was lacking. Such lack of assistance was evident in Avril's account:

So the lecturer, the lecturer knows the students are not upholding their weight and at the end of the day, they still don't make it their business to rectify that problem. They say 'Well, you all figure it out yourselves' which is sad and unfair.

Avril seemed frustrated and disheartened by the lack of intervention of lecturers despite their awareness of that the problem of free riding creates conflict in the groups. The lack of desired assistance was manifested also in Irene's account when she shared:

… even though you tell the lecturer well you know this part you have assigned to Tom, he didn't do. No. They don't want to hear that. 'You all are in a group and you all need to learn how to work together as a group.

Such lack of assistance led participants to feel frustrated and some also felt disheartened. According to Irene, *"it makes you feel frustrated. It makes you feel like, 'You know what, I should just drop this course'.* Irene's frustration also seem to be as a result of what she perceived to be lack of empathy and concern by the lecturers for the challenges that she was experiencing within her group while doing the group project. She also seemed to have felt disheartened and this led to her wanting to drop the course.

The desire of the participants for assistance as they experienced their challenges with group work and intragroup conflict which was perceived to be lacking was a notable aspect of the experience of the participants. All of the participants seemed to have felt that they were either unable or ill-equipped to effectively deal the intragroup conflict on their own and therefore desired assistance, mostly external intervention to provide guidance and direction with respect to communication within the group, group deliberations, decision making and conflict resolution. Most seemed to have an expectation of assistance from the lecturers or tutors in the course that gave the group

project and as illustrated by Avril and Irene, there was frustration when such assistance was not provided. This all added to the difficulty experienced by the participants and contributed to their perception of injustice.

Master Theme Three: Desiring to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict

This master theme conveys the great desire of participants to do well in the task to which their group was assigned. This desire appeared to have informed the actions of the participants in relation to the task such as prioritizing the task and the grade and taking personally, the actions of group members which were related to the task. This master theme also captures the participants' desire to focus on the task and not the conflict. Hence, the subthemes are wanting to do well and prioritizing the grade, taking actions related to the task personally and subtheme of the task versus the conflict which describes the desire of the participants' to focus on the task and not be distracted by the conflict. This master theme was a very strong theme and was evident in the accounts of all nine participants.

Wanting to do well and prioritizing the grade. All the participants in their accounts expressed a desire to do well in the tasks that their groups had been assigned. As a result, they all seemed to have prioritized getting good grades which was the means by which they would be found to have done well. Accordingly, getting good grades was a foremost focus and not getting good grades was a major concern for all of the participants throughout the experience.

The priority of and concern for the grade were clearly evident in Avril's account when she shared, '…*my concerns were basically my grade. That was my biggest concern.*

So throughout the entire experience, I am thinking about my… because I like to see really good grades." Christine shared a similar sentiment when she stated, *"My major concern is to get good grades"*. Irene also said, '*My grade is important and I don't want to fail this course'*. These statements revealed the significance of the grade and the concern of not doing well appeared to be matters that were bearing upon the minds of all the participants during the conflict within their groups.

Additionally, all the participants appeared to have perceived that their grades could be negatively affected by the conflict and by actions of group members. Hence, all seemed to have been willing to do take action to ensure that grades were not negatively affected. This was shown when Avril said, *"…at the end of the day, it is my marks, so I will do whatever I have to do."* This statement demonstrated that she was prepared during the conflict to do whatever she had to do because her grade was involved.

Moreover, the accounts of the participants showed that many of them took action in order to prevent their grade from being negatively affected by the conflict. One such action was doing extra to make up for those group members who were not performing so that they could complete the task and obtain good grades. For example, Gary shared that he and the other group members did the part of the non-contributing group member *"because we were thinking about the grade and the greater good of the grade."*

Another action involved some participants attempting to take control of the task and how it was to be done in order to ensure that they received good grades. This was seen when Avril stated:

> *So sometimes persons may feel intimidated because I want to be the one in*
>
> *control. So I guess maybe sometimes, persons may think that, that you know, she*

is this kind of bossy person or she wants things done X, Y and Z way. But at the

end of the day, I am just protecting my grade.

Avril wanting to be in control and wanting things done a particular were all actions that were geared towards making sure she did well and that her grades were not negatively affected by the actions of her group members or the conflict. Thus, she saw her actions as '*protecting her grade'*. Christine shared a similar account where she was viewed by her group members as wanting to '*make the assignment her own'* and shared that her actions were geared only to obtain a good grade saying of the incident "*My only intention was for us all to get a good grade."*

Another action taken by one of the participants, Irene, which demonstrated that she prioritized the grade because she wanted to do well, was that of acting as conduit of information between group members who were in conflict. Based on Irene's account, she took the action of '*being the middle person delivering messages back and forth'* when she felt that the conflict within the group would jeopardise her grade. She therefore seemed to have seen her action as necessary to get her group to work together so that the conflict will not negatively affect her grades and she can do well.

Taking actions related to the task personally. The accounts of six of the nine participants, Avril, Barbara, Debra, Erica, Frank, and Irene indicate that during the conflict, they took personally, the actions of their group members even though those actions were related to the task. This is manifested in the account of Avril when she shared about the interaction in her group where her view was not accepted by the rest of the group members. She said, "*I mean, I took it personal because they…they…they were saying stuff like, you know, that's why I don't like to work with her and you know… stuff*

like that.” When further questioned about taking the actions of her group members personally she answered, “*Yes, because I take my grade seriously; personal to the point where if I had to do the entire project myself, I will.”* It appeared therefore that Avril saw the non-acceptance of her views as negatively affecting her grade and therefore negatively affecting her. This is why she took the actions of the group personally, even though those actions were related to the task.

Barbara also described feeling rejected when her group did not accept her contribution to the project saying that '*what was also making me feel upset was…am… being rejected.* When probed she further explained:

> *Well, I have a position and I put forward this position and the persons I put forward this position to, they have completely rejected what I have to say or rejected my position, rejected the significance of my contribution and that made me feel belittled, made me feel inadequate.*

Barbara's therefore appeared to link the rejection of her contribution to the task by her group members as a rejection of her as a person.

Another instance in which many of the participants took personally, actions that were related to the task was where group members may not have been contributing or sufficiently contributing to the task. This is exemplified in Debra's account when she shared about how she felt about the actions of a group member whose actions she felt was not benefiting the group project. Debra used words such as '*this is how you are treating me*'; 'feel *the need to protect myself from emotional harm'; 'even it's about a group work… that's emotional harm for me'; 'you not helping me'; 'this is how you treat me'.* These words all indicated that even though the actions of the group member were related

to the task, Debra interpreted those actions as being directed against her personally. Therefore, this led to her feeling the need to protect herself from the 'emotional harm' and treatment she perceived was being meted out to her personally by her fellow group member.

This subtheme was also very evident in Irene and Avril's account. It was displayed when Irene shared about crying sometimes and feeling that the action of the group members in not contributing equally to the task showed that they did not care about her personally. She said, "…*it seems like the other members don't care about their grade and they don't care about you as a person and your grade as well and your GPA and how it will look on your transcript."* Likewise, it was shown in the account of Avril when she expressed annoyance and frustration in relation to the actions of a group member who had not contributed from the beginning and only showed up towards the end of the project. She said: *'No. It has to be said. I have to tell her because she was supposed to be here from the beginning. Why she want to be here now and why she want to make my life miserable now?'* Avril's use of the words *'my life'* demonstrated that she took the group member's actions as being directed against her personally.

The reactions of participants who took the task related actions of their fellow group members as directed against them personally seemed to have been connected to the desire of the participants to do perform well in the task. They seemed to have perceived the actions of their fellow group members as threatening their desire to do well and therefore as directed against them personally.

Task versus conflict: wanting to focus on the task and not the conflict. The subtheme was manifested in the accounts of seven of the participants, Avril, Christine,

Debra, Erica, Gary, Hannah and Irene and was constant as the participants shared their experiences. These participants all revealed a desire during the conflict to focus on the assigned task and not to be distracted or pulled into the conflict.

This subtheme manifested a struggle for many of the participants between desiring to focus on the task and not be pulled into the conflict which was viewed as a distraction from the group task. Debra gave some insight into this struggle faced with respect to keeping focus on the task in the midst of the conflict when she stated in relation to the conflict with a group member:

> *It's affecting my mood. So any little thing that is related to group work, I would approach it differently and it might affect the work because just seeing you will get me angry and I wouldn't pay attention to the work and I will probably not be open enough to analyze the information or what not, just because you are there sitting next to me. I will be thinking about you more than I would be thinking about the work. I will be thinking of you not helping me and that would affect the work.*

Debra's statement clearly show that conflict affected her frame of mind with respect to focusing on the task and seemed to express what all of the other six participants appeared to have thought with respect to the task and the conflict, that is, that the conflict would divert focus away from the task and therefore negatively affect the task.

As a result, the participants' thoughts and actions during the conflict appeared to have been influenced by this understanding and by their desire to focus and have their group members focus on the task and not be distracted by the conflict. Such thoughts were revealed when Irene shared the thoughts she had during the intragroup conflict:

So with all this going on I am thinking, 'Ok, what do I need to do now to get this group to kind of just see eye to eye together just to get this done, just to get the task done? What… it is I can do to make them say, 'Here what, we'll work together to just get the task done

Irene's desire was clearly to focus and have the group focus on getting the task completed. Gary described actions he took which were in line with Irene's thoughts about getting the task done. This is evident in his response to his group when some of his group members were engaging each other in conflict:

…I told them, 'Ok, guys. Right now, our focus should be the project. So let's focus on the project. We could discuss all these things after. Let's focus on the project because we need to get it done.' That was all I was thinking, getting the project done.

His statement demonstrated that he wanted to focus on the task and not on the conflict and so emphasized for his group the need to get the group project done. He therefore tried to steer the group away from focussing on the conflict to focussing on the task at hand.

The desire to focus on the task and not the conflict was manifested in the account of Debra by the measure she took to ensure that she stayed focused on the task. She shared that she consciously ignoring the offending group member and that it "*helped because I got the work done and didn't have to deal with…dealing with her.*" Similarly, Hannah talked about '*wanting to prevent more conflict'* within her group because she '*wanted the group to be stable'* because if the group was not stable they '*would not get our work done'* and *'wouldn't get our work finished in time".*

From all of these accounts, it is clear that a major aspect of the experience of all the participants was their desire to perform well in the task assigned in the midst of the conflict. They pursued this desire by prioritizing the grade. Actions perceived as threatening or working against this desire were taken by the majority of participants as directed personally against them affecting how they interacted or perceived their fellow group members. The majority of the participants seemed to have experienced a struggle during the conflict, between their desire to focus on the task and being pulled away from the task by the conflict and sought to take steps that will allow them or the group to focus on the task and not the conflict.

Master Theme Four: Feeling Powerless or Not in Control and Wanting to Give Up or Giving Up

All of the participants during their conflict experience appear to have experienced a sense of helplessness or powerlessness and many expressed that they had a desire to give up during the conflict or actually gave up. This master theme captures this aspect of the intragroup conflict experience of the participants.

Feeling Powerless or not in control. This subtheme was manifested in all of the accounts of the participants as all seemed to have experienced powerlessness or lack of control to influence change during their intragroup conflict experience. This was demonstrated in the account of Avril when she stated, "*I'll be honest with you, whenever there is a group activity…oh my Lord …I will try…I…I…it's only so much I can do but there are some things I don't have control over".* Avril seemed to have accepted that she had no control when it came to group work, and so was resigned to the fact that there was not much she could do because of this lack of control.

Debra highlighted helplessness when she describing her experience during the conflict and said, "…*it's like you are on a boat and you are just going up and down, up and down, up and down…"*. She uses the metaphor of a boat to describe the experience during the conflict and her use and the words '*going up and down*' signify her lack of control and helplessness. Her repetition of these words indicate that the feeling of helplessness or lack of control was not a one off experience but that it lingered during the conflict.

In Hannah's account powerlessness was revealed when she indicated that there was not much she could have done to change the negative impact of a group member not contributing:

> *… I couldn't do anything about it too because it's a group work and what happens to one person will affect the others…When I mean, I couldn't do anything about it, I was saying, if I approach the girl about the problem that will cause more conflict in the group.*

Hannah's sense of powerlessness to address the situation occurring in the group, came from her unwillingness to cause more conflict in the group. As a result, she felt that she could not do anything about her group member's non-contribution and since it was group work she accepted that she would be affected by the actions of her fellow group member.

Helplessness and lack of control were also evident in the account of Frank when in sharing his experience with intragroup conflict and it constant recurrence, he said, "…*so the following year when you go through a class you become despondent. Your response is like, 'Well, things won't change anyway. Well, this is like the bad end of the stick every time'.* He seemed to have thought that nothing will be done to change the

challenges he experienced when there was intragroup conflict while doing group work. Later on in his account he shared similar feelings about recurring group conflict:

…it's very important every year, we're stating how we feel about it, it's not being addressed so every year it comes back around; you have a conflict. The…the…the same thing with group assignment we had. Every group assignment in the school had conflict.

Frank's description of his experience of helplessness indicate that it also evoked feelings of hopelessness and frustration. Barbara's account also manifested similar feelings as she shared about her lecturer's response when she had sought assistance by reporting the difficulty she was experiencing as the group leader in her group:

…I got very upset at that person. Very upset and I told the lecturer at that point. I told the lecturer. And I said…I said, 'Miss, this is what I faced in this group.' And she said, she turned to me, the class was Leadership and Management, she turn to me and she said, 'That is what a leader has to face so deal with it'. I said, 'What?' [Sighs] So she said, 'That's what leadership is about, deal with it'. And it was at that point I made a decision not to be a leader again.

From Barbara's account, it appeared that she felt that since the lecturer would not provide assistance, she was powerless to deal with the conflict or to perform as leader and this led to her making a decision never to be a group leader again. Barbara's sigh as she spoke about the incident was a sign that manifested frustration and hopelessness along with her perceived powerlessness to address the situation with which she was faced as a group leader.

Gary also displayed helplessness in his account when he described the conflict as *"basically taking over our lives"*. This statement showed that he felt consumed and controlled by the conflict. He did not seem to feel that he had control of the conflict situation. This contributed to him feeling stressed which according to him was as a result of the conflict. When asked why he felt stressed he again repeated "*because I felt that it was taking over my life"*. From his description, Gary seemed to have felt that he had no way of taking control of the conflict and as a result felt overwhelmed and stressed as a result of his perceived lack of control and power.

Wanting to give up or giving up. This subtheme was evident in the accounts of six of the participants (Christine, Debra, Erica, Frank, Gary and Irene). These participants, at various points in their accounts, expressed that they had a desire to give up or actually gave up because of all that they were experiencing during the conflict. This desire was manifested in statements such as Christine's when in describing how she felt in the midst of the conflict with fellow group members, said, "*I just wanted to get out. It wasn't good. It wasn't good, that's all. I know it was going to affect my grade and for that reason I just wanted it to be over."* Similarly, Erica shared "*I did not want to be in the group anymore. I cried."* This desire arose as a result of the conflict that had been occurring in her group and how she felt she was being treated by her group members. Erica's desire to give up was coupled with emotional distress which was manifested by her crying.

While Christine's and Erica's desire was to quit or leave their groups, other participants simply wanted to quit making contributions to the task or pushing for the task to get done. This is demonstrated in Debra's account when she said, "*At that point, I was*

just tired of doing any more work. I just gave up, it was like whatever." She further stated, "*I just gave up. I gave up. I gave up because after pushing for the first time….well after pushing for a second time and you're still not getting results, I just, you know, I gave up.* Frank described reaching a point where he did not care when she said, "*And sometimes you reach a point where you don't care. Sometimes, you turn a paper in and you don't care if it wasn't done. Whatever grade we get, we get."* He seemed at this point to have surrendered his desire to do well or to obtain a good grade.

Some of the participants went beyond desiring to give up to actually giving up. This was demonstrated in Gary's account when he shared that he became so negatively affected by the conflict that he gave up his position in the conflict. He said, "*And so it got to the point where I just decided, I give up. I just put my hands in the air and I gave up because it came to the point where I literally could not focus. I couldn't focus on studying."* The subtheme is highlighted also in Irene's account when she said:

> *So it's all sort of mixed emotions you have, but you just want to get it done at the end of the day. You just want to be over with it. Sometimes, you just want to give up but you say you're giving up but you don't. But mentally you…emotionally you've given up on the group.*

Irene's account revealed that even though she did not outwardly give up on the group she had given up mentally and emotionally. In all the accounts, wanting to give up or giving up seemed to be as a result of the participants experiencing difficulty or challenges and feeling that they were unable or powerless to address the conflict situation and the challenges that arose.

Master Theme Five: Negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions

This master theme seeks to encapsulate the negativity that appeared to pervade the intragroup experience of all the participants. It highlights the prominent negative emotions experienced by the participants during the conflict and the impact of these emotions on the participants. It also articulates the negative perceptions and attitudes of participants towards group work and towards group members.

Negative emotions. This was a very strong subtheme. The participants all experienced a range of negative emotions during the conflict which was evident in their accounts. The most prominent of these negative emotions were anger, frustration, apprehension, discouragement and resentment.

Anger. Anger was prominent in the accounts of all the participants and manifested also as upset, irritation, and annoyance. Such emotion was seen when Avril described how she felt as she was experiencing conflict with her group member. She said, "I *was annoyed; I was angry; I was irritated; I was upset. O Lord, I was just all the bad words in the books".* She talked about being angry at herself, "*So, I mean I was mad because of the things that I said to her and I was mad for the fact that I even answered her…"* and angry because of the grade she received, "*Oh, when I saw the grade I was mad. I was mad."* Christine talked about being upset about her grade, "*I'm upset about my grade, so nothing would help me"* and about the difficulty she experienced in letting go because of the depth of the anger she experienced towards her group members saying, "…and *it was so hard letting go because I was really, really, really mad".*

Barbara also experienced being upset in relation to the behavior of one of the group members who influenced the group to not respond to her or not to be receptive to her contribution:

So I was really upset that she would shut down my point of views like that and I was really upset that she was able to persuade the other members not to…am…give me a response and not to…am…not to be receptive to the things I had to say.

Frank also shared about the anger he experienced and in response to being asked to whom or what was his anger directed, explained, "*The anger is towards two things, both the individual, my classmate and secondly in turn into…three things. Secondly, to the teacher as well as the system*". All the participants at different points in their accounts described experiencing some sort of anger, upset or similar emotion during their intragroup conflict experience. Such emotions were directed at their fellow group members, themselves, the grade received, the system or at what they perceived to be injustice towards them.

Frustration. Another prominent negative emotion that marked the experience of all the participants was frustration. Some of the participants were able to articulate clearly the frustration that they felt during the conflict. For example, Avril expressed that she was frustrated by the free riding, the unacceptable work produced by group members and feeling like the 'lone voice' in the group saying, "*It's frustrating"* and "*I was frustrated a lot of the times."* Irene in relation to feeling that her group was 'stuck' and was not progressing described the feelings she experienced:

Frustrated…frustrated. Sometimes you'll be three o'clock in the morning with another group member who is just as frustrated with you. Sometimes you're

crying because in your mind it's like, I have so much work to do and yet again I

still have this group project and it seems like the other members don't care about

their grade and they don't care about you as a person and your grade as well and

your GPA and how it will look on your transcript.

Her feelings of frustration were clearly evident and may have been overwhelming at times since she shared that she sometimes cried as a result her frustration in the group being unable to progress with the group project because of the conflict and the group member's perceived lack of concern.

Most participants openly expressed their feelings of frustration, others expressed it through their body language mainly by 'sighs', some of them loud sighs, as they spoke about their intragroup experiences. This was evident with Debra who sighed as she shared about her challenges with dealing with sensitive issues such as the conflict issues she was facing. She said ""*I don't like to talk about [sighs], you know, touchy issues*". Her sighing appeared to be an expression of self-frustration with her perceived inability and vulnerability in relation to addressing conflict issues with which she was faced in her group.

Similarly, Barbara sighed as she shared about the response of the lecturer to whom she had sought assistance with respect to the non-compliance of a group member. Barbara's sigh appeared to have been a sign of her exasperation at the whole situation and the fact that the lecturer was clearly unwilling to intervene as she may have expected. Her laughter at this time suggested cynicism towards the explanation given by her lecturer for his/her non-intervention which seemed to have added to the frustration already being experienced by being unable to deal with the non-compliant group

member. Erica also shared about an incident she remembered during the intragroup conflict saying, "*I remember one time, probably just screaming out [laughs] because I was just so ... We had this assignment. Very strict deadlines and nothing, nothing and then towards the end she wouldn't even say anything. So we ended up doing the work ...*" Erica's '*screaming out'* as she described it, appeared to have been a release of unexpressed frustration that she had been feeling as a result of what was occurring in her group and which she could no longer contain within.

The emotion of frustration pervaded the accounts of the all participants. It was also identified in second master theme under the subthemes of injustice and lack of assistance and in the fourth master theme under the subtheme of powerlessness and lack of control where participants expressed frustration in relation to the circumstances that gave rise to these subthemes.

Apprehension. Apprehension was another negative emotion that characterized the experience of all participants. This apprehension was manifested in various forms such as anxiety, stress, distress, nervousness, uneasiness and feeling overwhelmed. Such apprehension was very evident in the account of Irene who expressed that she found group work and the conflict that came with it to be stressful. When asked to describe what that stress felt like she responded:

> *What it feels like, sometimes you would be…sometimes you would be like in a daze…like you just, this really happening? And then when you catch yourself like, 'Oh my God, I'm running out of time. Who can I…who can I turn to, to help me…to help me through this problem right now.' You're just nervous; you're fidgety; you're studying your grade. Like, I bite my nails and I bite my nails most*

when I am under pressure. So sometimes I have no more nails to bite because I

am under pressure. Right. So, it…it gives you this uneasy feeling and I don't like

to feel uneasy because that is not a nice feeling.

Christine manifested apprehension in her account when she described how she felt during the conflict knowing that she had other group assignments. She responded, *"It's…oh gosh! [Sighs] like [pause]… I just hope I don't have to do any. Even though I know I have to do it…"* Her use of the expression "oh gosh!" appeared to be an exclamation of her trepidation at the thought that she has to do another group assignment. Her sigh and pause were seemingly attempts to manage the apprehension or anxiety she was feeling when she thought about having to do another group assignment which may have similar conflict. She explained that having more group work would be for her *'like making enemies all over again'* and expressed her view that group assignments should not be given because *'it only causes conflict and confusion among members of the group…"* Gary explained that *'it was kind of…it was kind of an anxiety factor or stress factor for me where I just couldn't deal with it …"* He shared about the conflict taking *'a heavy toll'* on him and about not being able to deal with 'anxiety' or 'stress' factor in the conflict.

Additionally, the participants expressed apprehension about working in groups on future group projects as a result of their intragroup conflict experience. Such apprehension was very evident in the account of Avril when she stated, *"So you know for a fact that you're gonna be placed in groups and you are like already, 'Oh God, I am going to get this person [laughs]. I hope it's not she, I hope it's not he'…"* Frank shared, *"I have found myself for the most part for the past few years having negative experiences*

because of group conflict." He questioned whether group work was *"worth the stress"* and later commented that *"Every group assignment in the school had conflict."* The apprehension of the participants seemed to be based mainly on the view that further group work would mean further intragroup conflict.

> **Discouragement.** All of the participants also experienced various measures of discouragement which also manifested itself as dejection or hopelessness. Therefore, Barbara in describing her intragroup conflict experience, described it as *'a very discouraging and disappointing* time'. Discouragement was also very evident in the account of Frank when he talked about the conflict that occurred because persons in the group who "*do not do their part, do not give an input and at the end of the day get the same grade."* He shared that such a situation *"causes you to feel dejected or you lose that energy to want to work even hard because you are pulling and doing work for someone else."* Further, when asked to describe generally what it felt like being in the group while all the conflict was occurring, Frank said, *"If…to be honest with you, sometimes, it's a feeling of [pause] of hopelessness in a sense of the system keep failing."* Frank's feelings of hopelessness seem to have been as a result of the grading system failing to address the issues of free-riding that he has encountered in his group.

> Like Frank, Avril in speaking about her experience also shared about feeling depressed at times when she had to do extra in her group. She said, "*I mean at times I use to feel down because I am like…why is it always me? Why am I the only person who always have to be carrying everybody?"* Avril seemed to have felt that she had no choice but to 'carry everybody' and her dejection therefore seemed to have come from a sense of powerlessness to change this situation. This sense of powerlessness which was

highlighted in the subtheme of powerlessness in the fourth master theme also seemed to have motivated the discouragement that many of the other participants experienced during the conflict.

    Resentment. Another prominent negative emotion that was a part of the experience of some of the participants was resentment. While this emotion was not part of the experience of all the participants, it was manifested in the accounts of five of the nine participants namely Christine, Debra, Frank, Gary and Hannah. So for example, Debra talked about not engaging a group member with whom she was in conflict but building up resentment for that group member. She explained, "*I mean even though I don't engage…I mean it still affects me and I will keep it in and I will build up resentment.*" Frank talked about feelings of resentment he felt as a result of group members' actions saying, "*I think that not showing up and the blatant disrespect for the group, added resentment…*" Gary shared that he resented the members of his group who encouraged him to take a certain position in the conflict he had with another group member. He said, *"I resented them for it like, why did I…why did I allow myself to be a part of this?"* Hannah talked about being resentful because of having to do all of the work when one of the group members was not contributing. She said, "*I was resentful… just knowing that you know that I did all of the work.*" For all the participants, the resentment appeared to have been unexpressed and thought present, contained within.

    As the participants shared their stories, all seemed very aware of the negative emotions that they were experiencing. This was illustrated by Gary when, in talking about the conflict experience he said" "*With this experience it brought out a lot of negative emotions, anger, hate and uneasiness…*" He acknowledged the negative

emotions that came with the intragroup conflict he experienced. Frank described the mixture of negative emotions he experienced when he talked about the struggle occurring in his group saying that "*it just kept on being a tugging battle back and forth of anger, resentment…*"

Many of the participants also demonstrated awareness of the impact of the negative emotions on them. This was very evident in the account of Christine when she stated, "*I was like really emotionally affected because it was like every time I reflect on it, I would get upset. I will not get upset at the grade. I will get upset at the persons.*" Christine further shared that as a result of the conflict she "*was kind of an emotional wreck for a while, a good while. I got to the point where I [brief pause], I actually hated them. That's how strong it was…*" Debra talked about the negative emotions being an '*emotional burden'* and *"emotional baggage"* that she now had to deal with in additional to the "*academic that stresses you out physically"*.

The significant impact of the negative emotions manifested in the accounts of some of the participants who described continuing to experience the negative emotions about the conflict and towards their group members despite the group project being completed. This was illustrated in Christine's story when at the point of the interview she said that she was "*Still very angry and upset. Very much."* Similarly, Erica in sharing her experience recognized that there was lingering hurt from the conflict. She said, "*Actually, reflecting on some of these things now, I realize that there is still some hurt."* Her statement clearly demonstrated the considerable impact of negative emotions experienced by some of the participants during the conflict; so considerable that for participants like

Erica and Christine, the negative emotions lingered for a while after the intragroup conflict.

Negative perceptions and attitudes. From their accounts, all the participants seemed to have had negative perceptions and attitudes towards group work. Such negative perceptions and attitudes were very evident in the account of Christine who shared that working in a group for a group project "*has been an experience I will never want to get again"*. She further stated about group work:

> *It did not help in anyway at all. It just created conflict. It gave me enemies and for that I am not looking for. I didn't come to…well to the school to actually get enemies. I just came here to do good and to get out. That is all.*

Christine therefore saw no benefit in having group work and seem to have felt that it negatively impacted relations in such a way to create enmity with her peers.

Most of the participants seemed to have been negative towards group work because of the negative intragroup experience believed that future group work will have similar conflict. Thus Hannah commented, *"I did not want to do any group work in the future for fear that similar conflict will occur while doing that group work."* Similarly, Irene shared that for her group work was very stressful. She said:

> *I cringe at the sight of or the thought or the hearing that we have group work to do because I know immediately, 'My God, different personalities…we're going to have…we…because of what has happened in the past, you already come in with this preconceived notion that, I'm going to get somebody who is going to be a slacker. I'm going to get somebody who is going to be…am demanding. I'm going to have a group member who always has to see about her children or…so you*

come in with these feelings because it is something that you already experienced

in the past before.

So many of the participants like Irene seemed to have negative preconceived notions about group work based on their intragroup conflict experience which led to or contributed to them having negative attitudes towards group work.

Many of the participants also had negative attitudes and perceptions of their fellow group members based on their actions during the conflict. This is demonstrated by Avril when she shared:

So it's like, like you say, I mean you know what kind of person this person is. So they are not going to change. So when you meet them in another course, yes the information is different but then the attitude is the same. So then you still carry on this…this…this kind of tension towards this particular person… it's like you're not letting your guards down…

Debra's comments also illustrate the nature of the negative perception and attitude that many of the participants had toward their group members as a result of their intragroup conflict experience with them. Her comments, in relation to one of her group members who she felt created conflict and difficulty within the group were, *"I just painted a picture of her that will never…will never go away because of that whole experience."* When probed Debra further explained, "*So that's always going to be you when I see you, that's it. That's all I am going to see. I am going to see laziness. I am going to see you never trying to be proactive, always late. No effort, that's all I am going to get."* Avril's and Debra's statements reveal what seemed prominent in the accounts of a majority of the participants, that is, that during the conflict, the participants were making assessments

of their fellow group members based on their conduct during the intragroup conflict. Any perceived negative actions of their group members with whom they were in conflict, or who they felt caused conflict, seemed to have been seen a reflection of their character which led the participant to make negative judgments as to character of their group members and the kind of persons they felt they were. These negative judgment and perception seemed therefore to have informed their negative attitudes towards their group members.

Master Theme Six: Coping with the conflict: Avoiding and not engaging

Another prominent feature of the intragroup conflict experience of the participants was the manner in which all of the participants sought to cope with the conflict. During the conflict, all nine participants dealt with the conflict by avoiding or otherwise finding ways to not engage in the conflict. Most of the participants tried to ignore the conflict and attempted to focus on the task rather address the conflict issues. For example, Avril commented that she 'surpassed' the conflict by focussing on the task saying, "*So whoever was not holding up their weight, then, I'll just make it my responsibility to do it*". Others ignored the conflict and withdrew or became disengaged. Barbara explained, "*During that period…during that period, I was able to cope by not focusing much on it. Am…At a certain point, I just totally ignored it*" and used the words '*just tuned out from it*' to describe disengaging herself from the conflict and the conflict issues occurring in her group. One participant, Christine, described accepting in her group "*what is less than what is actually supposed to be*", and this was done according to her "*just at the sake of avoiding conflict*". In other words, this participant seemed to have given in and accepted

what she considered to be a lower standard of work that she would have been able to produce in order to avoid conflict within her group.

In the very few instances where participants shared about engaging their fellow group members in the conflict they expressed regret for engaging. For example, Avril shared that rather than engaging her fellow group member she should have ignored her and Gary felt rather than engaging their fellow group member, his group should have sought the intervention of the lecturer. Both seemed to have felt that the proper way to deal with the conflict was to avoid or not engage and that they had erred in their approach to dealing with the conflict. In fact, Avril shared about being angry at herself for engaging in the conflict and for communicating how she felt to the group member about the group member's actions. She said, "*So, I mean I was mad because of the things that I said to her and I was mad for the fact that I even answered her because even though she was saying those things to me, I should have ignored because I knew that at the beginning she was never there".* Statements like Avril's demonstrate clearly what most of the participants shared that they felt and this is that ignoring, not engaging and generally avoiding the conflict was the most appropriate way to cope with the intragroup conflict.

In efforts to avoid engaging in conflict, the majority of participants found themselves being disingenuous. Most avoided communicating to the offending group members or group members that their actions were offending them, although many communicated the offence to other non-offending group members or persons outside of the group. The participants were all aware that they were being disingenuous and some seem to have felt badly about not being honest but they all seemed to have found that it

was necessary to cope. This was most evident in Debra's account when she explained

that she was aware that she was being dishonest by not being frank with the group

member about her actions. She said, "*I mean it's really…it's wrong. I know it's wrong*

but I …I choose not to tell you because I know how I feel. It is selfish but it's how I cope

with it." Another participant, Frank, admitted that if asked by the offending group

member how he felt about her actions, he would not have been honest with her saying, *"I*

would not have told her exactly how I felt." Frank described this interaction with his

fellow group member as being '*'kind of double standard'*. Hannah spoke along similar

lines, when she talked about the other group members along with her, pretending to

understand about a fellow group member's situation and hiding their feelings about the

girl's actions. She said "*Well, when I mean that we played like we understood, we…we*

knew about the situation but we tried to hide our feelings about it towards the girl".

Based on the accounts of all the participants, it appears that the hiding of emotions with

respect to conflict issues was a prevalent way in which the participants dealt with the

conflict.

The participants shared several reasons for avoiding or not engaging in the

conflict. The foremost reason for participants not engaging in conflict appeared to be the

fear of negative consequences as a result of the conflict. One such major fear seemed to

have been based on their perception that engaging in conflict will take effort away from

the task and therefore negatively impact the group's performance. This was quite evident

when Hannah shared about sidestepping the conflict to focus on the task, "*You want to*

get your work done. You want your marks. So, you will just put that aside. You will just

prevent that conflict and you do it." Irene also shared about not wanting '*to jeopardize'*

her grade and focussing on what she needed to do "*to get this group to kind of just see eye to eye together just to get this done, just to get the task done.'* This reason formed a subtheme, 'Task versus conflict: wanting to focus on the task and not the conflict' which was discussed in detail in Master Theme Three above.

Another factor in relation to the fear of negative consequences of the conflict that led participants to avoid or not engage in the conflict appeared to be their concern for relations (a subtheme that was discussed in Master Theme One above) as many shared about not wanting to offend, negatively affect relations or cause further conflict. This was clearly evident in Frank's account when he shared that even though he was angry about his group member's actions and agreed with his group that she should be made accountable for her actions, he avoided saying anything to her because he *"didn't want to ruffle any feathers.* His use of the expression *I didn't want to ruffle any feathers* clearly demonstrated that he did not want to offend or upset his fellow group member with whom he explained he previously had good relations. A similar unwillingness to engage in conflict was demonstrated in account of Gary when he explained about the manner in which he and his group dealt with an offending group member. He said, "…*we didn't really want to mash her feet as they say. So we were kind of putting up with her for her sake".* His use of the expression '*didn't want to mash her feet'* clearly illustrates that he, along with his group members, did not want to offend or upset the group member this unwillingness to offend seemed to have been based on being *'polite'* so as to keep good relations within the group. Erica, when asked about why she stayed quiet and did not respond when confronted by another member shared, "*I didn't want to cause further*

conflict." This statement reflected what most of participants expressed with respect to engaging in conflict in their groups and their concern about relations.

Debra also communicated this concern for relations when she explained, "*That's why I don't communicate and I don't engage because I know if I tell you something you might have this on your heart for me…*" She seemed to have felt that engaging in conflict or openly communicating to a fellow member how she felt about that member's behavior, may have led to that member having negative thoughts or emotions towards her and thus affect relations with that member. Hannah's account also exemplified the participants' unwillingness to engage so as to maintain good relations. In relation to the actions of a group member which created conflict in her group she said, "*I was stressed about it. I mean…you know is your friend. You try to excuse it and stuff…but I kept it all in because you know in groups, you don't want to make anybody feel bad…*" Hannah, similar to many of the other participants, chose not to engage the group member or even share how she felt about the member's behavior because she did not want to offend ("don't want to make anybody feel bad") even though she was stressed by the member's behavior and felt that the group member's actions were hindering the group.

Some of the other participants also shared about being uncomfortable and not knowing how to confront or deal with the conflict issues. This was most prominent in Debra's story, who throughout her account, shared about her discomfort and the vulnerability she experiences when engaging in conflict which leads her to avoid the conflict. She said, "*I don't like to engage in conflict because well, I…I'm really not sure why. But I don't like to [long pause], I guess it's, it's a bit vulnerable for me. I don't deal with that. It's too emotional for me*". Debra went on to explain, "*I don't like to talk about*

[sighs], you know, touchy issues". Her discomfort with engaging in conflict appeared to be as a result of not knowing how to communicate when dealing with issues that affect her personally and not wanting to deal with certain emotions that may arise if there was a discussion of the conflict issues. Other participants, such as Avril and Frank, also chose not to engage in any conflict because they felt they could not influence any change and therefore it would not make a difference with respect to the conflict. This is exemplified in Avril's account when she talked about her regret in engaging a group member. She said, "*So I should have never even bothered to answer because it would have just been me wasting my time .... So I figure that I shouldn't have. I should have just left it alone.*" Avril appeared to have felt that she could not influence any change by engaging in the conflict and thus that there was no benefit in communicating how she felt to the group member.

Based on the above, it is evident that this theme of coping with the conflict by avoiding or not engaging was a marked feature of the intragroup conflict experience of all the participants. This aspect of their experience was influenced by many factors some of which were discussed in detail in other master themes such as master themes 1, 2 and 3 above.

Master Theme Seven: Identity: Who I Am And Who I Am To Others

The seventh master theme identified in the experience of the participants was the theme of identity. This master theme manifested through issues of self-awareness and self-perception which seemed to be evident in the accounts of all the participants; the inner struggle and turmoil that most of the participants seemed to have experienced during the conflict; and the anxiety by some of the participant about how they were or

will be perceived by others and these all formed subthemes of the master theme of identity.

       Self-awareness and self-perception. The experience of all nine participants appear to be characterized by a conscious awareness of self or perception of self. This master theme was manifested in various ways during the conflict. One such way was through the participants' perception and awareness during the conflict of their character or personality. This was illustrated for example when Avril shared about her angry response to one of her group members with whom there was conflict. She commented, "*When I went home that night, I felt so bad because I mean, I am not that kind of person. I would control myself and that day I…I literally flipped and I felt so bad.*" Avril seemed to have felt that the manner in which she handled this particular conflict situation did not reflect the kind of person she perceived herself to be and as a result, was distraught that she acted contrary to her character and personality.

       Gary had a similar response to Avril and demonstrated self-awareness and self-perception when during the conflict he considered his actions along with the group's action against who he perceived himself to be. He said, "*I am the type of person, if these girls, if Sandra wasn't in the group, I think I would have allowed whatever the girl was doing to take place. I don't think I would have been as hard on her. I probably would have told her what I had in mind and stuff but I don't think I would have come to the point where I would have put her out of the group.*" When probed as to why he thought this, Gary responded, "*Because I don't think I'm that kind of person.*" Gary's sense of self came to the fore as he considered his actions and that of the group against his perception of himself and expressed that his action of agreeing to evict the group member

did not reflect his character and the type of person he felt he was. Many participants during the conflict also demonstrated awareness of perceived weaknesses. Barbara commented, "*So I am not so good at being groups and perhaps it's because I have a dominant personality…*" Debra shared: "*I have a serious problem and I know it. Communication is an issue for me*"

Many of the participants in their accounts demonstrated that they were very aware of also their thoughts and emotions during the conflict and engaged in self-questioning when confronted with conflict issues and their reactions. This was very evident as Gary shared about the thoughts and questions that pervaded his mind in the midst of the conflict. He said:

> *And within the whole bacchanal, I was always asking and questioning myself*
> *'Gary, is this you? Is this the type of person that you are? Is this who you want to*
> *be? Do you want to see someone ended up…am…ending up being an emotional*
> *wreck because of one assignment? And then I started thinking about that and then*
> *I started questioning like…like…like who I am. As I said, I was questioning is this*
> *who I am?*

Gary's engagement in self-questioning exemplified one of the issues that participants had to face in the midst of the intragroup conflict, that is, the issue of self and who they were or who they wanted to be during the conflict.

In trying to make sense of the intragroup conflict and what had been occurring in their groups, most of the participants seemed to have looked within themselves or done some inner reflection. This was illustrated in Erica's story when in speaking about one of her experiences with intragroup conflict she stated that it "*caused inner reflection as well.*

Anytime anything like that happens, I would reflect…inner reflect". She further stated*, "I always start from me and then I work out."* The participants seemed to have engaged in introspection during the conflict, as a means of assessing their role in contributing to the existence or occurrence of the conflict and as a means of maintaining their identity. At times, this introspection or the awareness of weaknesses exhibited in the conflict seemed to have caused some of the participants to experience anger or frustration with themselves. So Debra demonstrated frustration with herself calling herself *'a wimp'* for not communicating to the group member about her actions and then having '*to suffer for it'* because her grade was affected. Frank shared about being upset with himself for not being able to say no, "*I don't know how to say no and that's my problem in conflict too as well. Not knowing how to say no." 'Leader, like, I have done enough."* Like many of the other participants, Frank resented having to do the part of non-contributing members and seemed to have felt that he allowed himself to be exploited by the group member and group leader.

The level of awareness of self that all of the participants seemed to have had during the conflict seemed to have come to the fore as the participants grappled with the conflict issues within their group. Based on the accounts of the participants, it was evident that during the conflict, participants seemed to have had to deal, not only with their group members, but also with themselves and who they perceived themselves to be.

Struggle within self: Inner conflict or turmoil. Another subtheme was struggle within self which discussed the inner struggle or turmoil that participants seemed to have experienced during the conflict. The majority of the participants (six of the nine participants) seemed to have experienced some level of struggle within themselves during

the conflict and in some cases, this struggle appeared to have resulted in inner turmoil for the participant. Such turmoil was most evident in the account of Gary when he related having to make a decision with respect to evicting a group member who had not been contributing, from the group.

Gary shared about feeling conflicting emotions towards the group member which led to him feeling confused He said, "*I should feel a bit of …I should feel a bit of sadness for her. I should feel a bit of pity for her because she might end up failing the course*". He described thinking that it was fair for the group member to be held accountable for her lack of contribution by being evicted and agreed with that decision, yet at the same time struggled within himself and with that decision when he experienced sadness and pity towards the group member whose eviction he was aware may lead to her failing the course. Gary seemed to have struggled internally with respect to what was the correct thing to do in the conflict situation and was so confused he said, *"I didn't know which direction I was going in*". His inner confusion seemed to have made it very difficult to make a decision with respect to the correct action to take as a group member in the conflict.

From Gary's account it seemed as if his inner confusion intensified as he described with also experiencing conflicting emotions towards his other group members. He expressed feeling anger towards his group members who kept encouraging him to stick to his decision to evict the group member when he was rethinking his decision, yet wanted to support them. This led to him feeling contempt for his group members and to him experiencing regret for being in the group. He said, "*I think one of the most prominent feelings was… [short pause]…that feeling of …of contempt because [sigh] I*

kind of regretted joining that group". His feelings of contempt for his group members appeared to have been as a result of what he perceived to have been their contribution to his inner struggle and turmoil by encouraging him to support the group in evicting the group member despite his struggle. Gary clearly described his inner struggle and turmoil during the conflict when he said:

> *So it was kind of chaotic like, I was back and forth. I didn't know if I should feel pity for the girl. I didn't know if I should be angry at her. I didn't know if I should…should side with my other group members because I am thinking, if we are in a group and we decided that we were going to put her out, I should be sticking with them. So it was confusion. It was a LOT of confusion. [Emphasizes the word 'lot']*

In sharing his story he used and emphasizes the words 'a lot' and emphasized it by raising his voice to highlight the great amount of inner confusion he experienced at that time. Gary seemed to have understood his struggle as one related to his identity when he described the inner struggle he faced as '*cognitive dissonance where…where…this is not who you are but this is who they expect you to be"* and described this experience as *'very hard'*. Thus, Gary's struggle seemed to one in which he was struggling to maintain his sense of self and his self-identity in the midst of being pressured by his group members to act in a manner inconsistent with his self-perception and his core values.

Another participant, Debra described the inner struggle she experienced as a *'battle' going on in my mind or in my heart".* In relation to the *'battle'* she further explained, "*The battle is if I should cut you off or if I should let it go. And then the battle… the main question is, if you're worth cutting or if you are worth, you know, fixing*

the problem." Debra's inner struggle related to making a decision as to how to treat with the conflict issues and the offending group member during the conflict, and whether she should seek to address the issues or simply disengage. Frank's inner conflict manifested when he described wanting to do what offending group members were doing in not caring about the group work and not being bold enough to do it. Thus, in relation to group members who were focussing on individual projects and rather than the group projects which were left for other group members, Frank said, *"They are doing…they doing exactly what they wanted to do. You're know what I mean? Like you're doing exactly like I want to do but I ain't…I ain't bold enough to do it."* Frank's inner conflict therefore appeared to have resulted because his actions were in direct conflict with his desires. He shared about experiencing similar conflict between his desires and his action when he described wanting to say no to the extra work he had to do because of the group member's lack of contribution but nonetheless saying yes and then being upset for not doing what he really wanted to do.

Accordingly, the intragroup conflict resulted in the majority of the participants experiencing internal struggle or conflict as they sought to maintain their identity and sense of self in the face of the conflict and while being a part of the group. The inner conflict occurred as a result of inner inconsistencies such as inconsistency between the participant's thoughts and behavior, conflicting emotions towards group members, inconsistency between the participant's values or desires and the behavior of the group or conflicting desires with respect to decision-making.

Concern about the perception of others. This subtheme addresses the concern most of the participants experienced with respect to how they were perceived or were

going to be perceived by others. This theme was represented in the accounts of six of the nine participants. It involved the issue of face and the positive image that participants wanted to project or communicate for themselves during the conflict so as to be seen by their group members in a certain manner. This was very evident in the account of Avril when she said:

> *Sometimes, it was uncomfortable because sometimes, I mean you are a young adult and persons might be saying, 'Who she, who she think she is?' You know, that kind of attitude. So sometimes, I will try to be careful because at the end of the day, I don't want to bring on that wrong impression of the person I am.*

This statement clearly demonstrated that Avril was seemed concerned during the conflict about what image she was projecting about herself by her behavior to the other group members and the impression that her group members may have had of her based on her action. She clearly did not want her group members to get an incorrect impression of who she perceived herself to be a person. As such, Avril commented, '*What was most difficult is, I guess maybe me having a bad name. Like you know, persons might be saying that…maybe sometimes I can come over…I can maybe come across a bit pushy or maybe like if I want things done that way, you know*." So for Avril, like most of the other participants, there was concern about how they were being perceived by their group members and the reputation they were building within their groups. This concern appeared to be a concern about their social identity, that is, the image that they had created for themselves in the group.

This concern with respect to social identity was illustrated also in the account of Frank, who had similar concerns about how he was perceived within his group. This was

evident when he said that one of his concerns "*would have been what is being said about me*". He discussed his concern about "*getting that group approval*" and shared questions that concerned him which involved whether his group members really knew him. He further asked in relation to his concern, "*Do they feel that Frank is someone they can trust, someone they can work with again?* From his account, it was evident that he was concerned about the image that the group members had of him and obtaining the trust, approval and support of the group appeared to be important to him. As in the cases of the majority of participants, these were issues of face in that the participants all seemed to be concern about the image that they were creating or created for themselves within their groups and appeared to be an important aspect of their lived experience.

Further, participants seemed to have been concerned about their image beyond the conflict. This is illustrated best by Erica when she said that "*how you are treated at law school continues into your career. People's perception of you…am…continues even after you become a lawyer.*" The concern about the perception of others was illustrated clearly by Erica's comment, "*I wondered how people would view me...am…as a lawyer going forward.*" Many of the other participants shared a similar concern about how they were perceived based on their conflict interaction would continue beyond the group project and would inform the reputation they acquired and how they would be viewed by their peers in their careers going forward. The participants therefore seemed to have thought that the image that was formed of them as a result of the conflict could have implications going forward with respect to how they are viewed later on as they embark on their careers.

Summary

This chapter presented the thematic findings from the analysis conducted on the data collected from the nine participants. The analysis resulted in seven master themes

which provided insight into the lived experience of the participants and into how they

understood and made sense of their lived experience of intragroup conflict. These master

themes were negative interaction with resultant concern; difficulty and injustice without

desired assistance; desiring to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the

conflict; powerlessness and wanting to give up or giving up; negative emotions, attitudes

and perceptions; coping with the conflict: avoiding not engaging; and identity: who I am

and who I am to others (See Table 3). Verbatim extracts from the interviews of the

participants were presented to support each theme and their subthemes.

Chapter 5: Discussion

The previous chapters of this dissertation outlined the background and purpose of this study, presented a review of the literature related to the topic and a theoretical framework to support this study, described the research methodology and presented the findings. This chapter will include a discussion of the findings and how they relate to the research questions and the literature as well as an examination of the findings in relation to the theoretical framework. This chapter will also discuss the implications of the findings for practice, how this study can contribute to the field of conflict resolution, the limitations of the study and recommendations for further research.

Summary of the Study

The aim of this study was to gain an understanding into the lived experience of students in tertiary education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. The researcher sought to provide a detailed description of the perspectives and experiential concerns of the participants by addressing the following research questions:

3. What is the lived experience of Caribbean students in higher educational programs who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work?

4. How do Caribbean students in higher educational programs understand and make sense of their lived experience of intragroup conflict?

An interpretative phenomenological analysis was conducted to gain insight into world of nine participants and to provide a detailed description of the way in which the participants viewed and experienced the phenomenon of intragroup conflict. Data was collected by conducting in-depth individual semi-structured interviews with the participants. The thematic findings presented in Chapter 4 reflect the lived experiences of

students in tertiary educational programs and how they understand and make sense of their lived experience of intragroup conflict.

Summary of the findings in relation to the research questions

The findings of this study indicate that the intragroup conflict is experienced and understood by the participants as a negative phenomenon. The participants appeared to have experienced negative interactions which involved negative communication in the form of poor, difficult or non-existent communication. Alienation was also a part of the experience with some participants feeling alienated or alienating themselves from their groups and other participants orchestrating the alienation or isolation of group members with whom they were in conflict. All the participants appear to understand the conflict as having a negative impact or possible negative impact on relations and interaction with group members. As a result, there was concern and anxiety about the conflict affecting relations and interactions with group members and other peers with whom they must interact and in other current or future courses, group projects or in their future professions. Therefore, the majority were apprehensive about future group projects with their group members or with new group members.

The lived experience of the participants was also found also to be characterized by difficulty, perceived injustice and a lack of desired assistance which appear also to have contributed to the participants' understanding of the experience as negative. The difficulty was experienced for reasons which included dealing with the group dynamics, the conflict itself, the negative interactions and negative emotions and dealing with the inequitable contribution and free riding of group members. Most of the participants experienced a sense of injustice during their conflict experience which arose from sources

such as the grading system, the lack of a system to make students accountable for their actions and the lack of intervention or assistance provided to them during the conflict not available to them.

During the conflict, the participants appeared to have experienced a sense of powerlessness which contributed to their negative experience. This sense of powerlessness seems to be related to the perceived difficulty and injustice encountered by the participants along with their perceived inability to address those difficulties and injustices and to obtain external intervention or assistance. In some instances, this sense of powerlessness gave way to hopelessness about there being any positive change going forward with respect to intragroup conflict and group work. As one participant, Frank, expressed *'things won't change anyway'*. Accordingly, the majority of participants yearned to be out of the experience and out of their groups. They seemed to have experienced a range of negative emotions during the conflict which included anger, frustration, discouragement, resentment and apprehension. The participants all seem to understand their experience of intragroup conflict as negative and all had negative attitudes and perceptions towards group work, group members or both. These negative attitudes and perceptions contributed to them experiencing apprehension about working in the future with group members with whom they had conflict or in with any group members in a group.

All of the participants seemed to have desired to perform well in their various group tasks and doing well translated for them into getting good grades which they prioritized. As a result, many took the task related actions of their fellow group members as directed against them personally because they seemed to have perceived such actions

as threatening their desire to perform well. The findings also indicate that the participants all appeared to have understood the conflict they were experiencing as dysfunction and thus viewed it to be a distraction from the group tasks and a threat to their desire to perform well. Therefore, as part of their sense-making, participants seemed to have felt that they needed to avoid or ignore the conflict so that the group could be functional. This led to disingenuousness by the majority of participants who made sense of their actions by believing it was necessary as a coping mechanism.

Additionally, as part of their sense-making, participants were preoccupied with issues of identity which formed a prominent aspect of their lived experience. All seemed to have manifested a strong sense of self and self-awareness which came to the fore as they faced the conflict issues. As a result, the majority engaged in either self-reflection or self-questioning and experienced some level of inner struggle or turmoil as they attempted maintain their sense of identity within the group during the intragroup conflict experience. Additionally, the majority also appeared to have been very concerned about their social identity. As such, concern about face, that is concern about the image that they created for themselves in the group and how they were being or would be perceived by others were important aspects of their lived experience. They seemed to have thought that how they were perceived as a result of the conflict, especially by their peers could have implications going forward in their careers.

The findings in relation to the literature

The findings of this study support previous studies on group work and intragroup conflict. The finding that intragroup conflict appears to be experienced as a negative phenomenon is consistent with the literature where students reported their group work

experience as negative and expressed a preference for individual work or a lack of

appreciation for group work as a result of their negative experiences (Bourner et. al,

2001; Burdett, 2003; Gottschall & García-Bayonas, 2008; Jung & Sosik, 1999; Payne et

al, 2005; Wilson et al., 2018). Also, the negative interactions between group members

found in this study are consistent with the studies in the literature which reported poor

communication (Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008; Hansen 2006) and tension as students

attempt to deal with the complexities of the group dynamics (Jehn et al., 1999; Miller et

al., 1994). In addition, this study supports prior research which has shown that students

have been alienated or alienated themselves while doing group work (Livingstone and

Lynch, 2000; Volet and Mansfield, 2006).

The difficulties, perceived injustice and lack of assistance that appeared to

characterize the lived experience of the participants support the literature. The difficulties

unearth in this study such as issues of free riding, inequitable contribution and having

extra work are also identified as challenges to group work in the literature. For example,

workload issues, perceptions of inequitable contribution among team members and free

riding were identified as major challenges encountered by students while doing group

work (Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Hall & Buzwell, 2012; Hansen, 2006; Pang & Hung,

2012; Payne, Sumter & Monk-Turner, 2005, Wilson, Ho & Brookes, 2018).

In relation to the sense of injustice found in this study, the literature suggests that

students are concerned about fairness and about group members contributing to their fair

share of the tasks in group work (Huff et al., 2002). As a result, students experience

discontent and perceive injustice when fellow group members, who did not contribute

equally, are awarded the same grades as the rest of the group (Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008;

Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Riebe et al., 2016). Burdett & Hastie (2009) suggested in their study that the often reported students' dissatisfaction with assessment in group work was as a result of this perceived injustice where there was a lack of distributive justice because the efforts of some group members did not match the rewards granted as well as a lack of procedural justice because the method of allocating rewards was perceived to be unjustified.

The lack of desired assistance revealed in this study supports the literature which indicate that there is a lack of guidance and support from instructors or tutors during the intragroup conflict experience and as students encounter challenges in group work (Bailey et al, 2015; Coers et al., 2010). This lack of support has been identified in the literature as a concern because of the important role that instructors can play in assisting students as they navigate the group dynamics and processes during group work (Bailey et al, 2015; Coers et al., 2010). Burdett & Hastie (2009) highlighted the need for instructors to provide support to students and to address procedural and distributive justice issues so that there can be increased student satisfaction with group work and improved learning outcomes. Bailey et al. (2015) in their study found that instructors' involvement in the group assignments of their students can improve group processes and contribute to students having a positive perception of group work. Natoli, Jackling & Seelanatha (2014) also found that students demonstrated a more positive attitude towards group work and perceived the benefits of group work when they experienced the support of their instructor in the formation and management of the group work as opposed to students who did not experience such support.

Another noteworthy feature of the lived experience of many of the participants was their feelings of powerlessness to change or influence what they were experiencing and their yearning to give up and not be a part of the group, as a result**.** The feeling of powerlessness seemed to be strongly associated with not having control which was manifested in the participants' inability to deal with conflict issues. This lack of control appear to have been compounded by the lack of intervention by those the participants perceived to be able to influence or effect change such as the instructors. Dijkstra, van Dierendonck & Evers (2005) in their study, considered the significance of the concept of control in influencing the response of the parties to the conflict. They highlighted literature which indicated that having control is an important resource and lack or threat of losing this resource can lead to feelings of distress and even physical or psychological withdrawal, once a situation is perceived as uncontrollable (Hobfoll, 1989; Seligman, 1979). Therefore, they hypothesized that in conflict, parties would experience the loss of control which would then result in feelings of helplessness. In support of their hypothesis, Dijkstra, van Dierendonck & Evers (2005) found that interpersonal conflict was positively related to feelings of helplessness and flight behavior. This result is supported by the finding in this present study with respect to the feelings of powerlessness (helplessness) that many of the participants expressed feeling during their intragroup conflict experience along with the desire that many had to give up and not be a part of the group (flight behavior).

The experience of negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions which formed a central part of the lived experience of participants accords with the literature which indicate that the intragroup conflict experience often involves of a very strong emotional

component in which negative emotions are experienced by students as they engage in

group work and encounter challenges (Burdett, 2003; Curseu et al., 2012; Park et al.,

2018). The range of emotions found in this study is consistent with what has been

unearthed in the literature for example, resentment (Burdett & Hastie, 2009), frustration

(Burdett, 2003; Lee, Smith & Sergueeva, 2016; Pang & Hung, 2012), anger (Burdett,

2003), hopelessness (Zschocke et al., 2016), confusion and anxiety (Miller, Trimbur &

Wilkes, 1994; Strauss & Young, 2011), and general discontent and dissatisfaction

(Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Hansen 2006). The findings in this

study also support the literature which shows that these negative emotions are heightened

by the challenges faced by the students and their inability to deal with the conflict and

perceived injustice (Aggarwal & O'Brien 2008; Burdett & Hastie, 2009; Riebe, Girardi &

Whitsed, 2016) as well as the lack of guidance or direction from instructors or tutors

(Bailey et al, 2015; Coers et al., 2010).

Additionally, the negative perceptions and attitudes that most of the participants

were found to possess are supported by previous research which found that as a result of

conflict and the other challenges leading to conflict, many students have negative

perceptions and opinions about working in groups (Akhtar et al., 2012; Bailey et al.,

2015; Bentley, 2013; Bourner et. al, 2001; Burdett, 2003; Chiriac, 2014; Payne et al,

2005). The literature also indicates that such negative perceptions and opinions may be

reflected in the attitudes and behavior of students during group projects and often

influence their attitude or approach towards future group work (Hansen, 2006; Payne et

al, 2005). The finding in this study with respect to the apprehension experienced by many

of the participants about working in the future with group members with whom they had

conflict or in with any group members in a group therefore accords with the literature with respect to impact of the impact on the negative perceptions on future group work.

In this present study, all of the participants seem to understand the intragroup conflict as being primarily negative and dysfunctional. As such, they saw conflict as having a negative impact by being a hindrance to the task on which they wanted to focus, and a threat to the group performing well, the latter being the desire of all the participants**.** The desire to perform well in the group assignments, disclosed in this study, accords with the literature which indicate that achievement is important for students. Burdett & Hastie (2009) found that achievement featured strongly in the reports of students about the best and worst aspects of group work. Similarly, Huff et al., (2002) noted how passionate students were about their goals and how this passion influenced their negative response to fellow group members who could not be trusted to do their share of the group work. Also, the conflict being understood as primarily negative by the participants in this study accords with the view postulated by Crossley (2006) that students understand conflict primarily as negative and as destructive to productive group work.

Another finding of this study revealed that the participants coped with the conflict predominantly by avoiding any engagement in the conflict. In the literature on conflict management, avoidance is considered one of the five preferred modes of dealing with conflict along with collaboration, competition, compromise and accommodation (Blake & Mouton, 1964). The finding of the participants primarily responding to the intragroup conflict by avoiding or not engaging in the conflict is consistent with other studies (Barsley & Wood, 2005; Crossley (2006)). Crossley (2006) suggests that students'

understanding of conflict as negative and detrimental to productive group work leads

them to avoid the conflict often equating their avoidance with the concept of 'effective

collaboration' (p. 34). This suggestion of conflict avoidance by students being associated

with their understanding of conflict as a hindrance to productive group work is consistent

with what was found in this study since one of the reasons for participants not engaging

in conflict appeared to be their perception that engaging in conflict will distract from the

task and hence negatively impact performance discussed in Master Theme Three.

Further, in the literature, conflict avoidance has been shown to have been

associated with high team functioning and effectiveness while collaborating and

competition responses have been negatively associated with overall team effectiveness

(De Dreu & Van Vianen, 2001). One of the reasons proffered by De Dreu & Van Vianen

(2001) in their study for the results was that engaging responses such as collaborating or

contending distracted members from the task to the conflict while the avoiding responses

removed that distraction and allowed the team to focus on the task. This reason accords

with what were expressed by participants in respect of both the Master Theme Six

(coping with the conflict: avoiding and not engaging) and Master Theme Three (desiring

to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict).

Other reasons for not engaging in the conflict, shared by participants in our study

include fear of negative consequences and not wanting to cause further conflict, not

wanting to offended or affect relations, discomfort or not knowing how to confront or

deal with the conflict issues and not having any control or being able to make a difference

with respect to the conflict or feeling that engaging in conflict is a waste of time. Many

of these are in line with reasons found or submitted in the literature for conflict

avoidance. For example, participants in the study conducted by Barsley & Wood (2005) expressed a concern for relations and the possible risks or negative consequences of the conflict as some of their reasons for not engaging in the conflict. Folger et al., (2018) also indicated that persons may sometimes avoid conflict because of a fear of the consequences of open conflict and confrontation. The reasons expressed by Avril appear to be associated with the feelings of powerlessness to change or influence what was occurring during the intragroup conflict, which was discussed in Master Theme Four (Feeling powerless and wanting to give up or giving up). As such, some participants did not seem to perceive any benefit in engaging in the conflict and so worked around it. This is in line with the sense of resignation and perception that engaging in the conflict was not worthwhile that were found by Barsky & Wood (2005) to be pervasive reasons given for avoiding the conflict.

Another major finding in this study was that the intragroup conflict experience evoked identity issues for the participants. These identity issues were manifested either in greater self-awareness, engagement in self-reflection, self-questioning, inner conflict or turmoil and issues of face. This finding supports the literature on face and interpersonal conflict. Hocker & Wilmot (2018) suggest that identity is one of the four types of goals that parties to a conflict pursue. They argue that during a conflict the disputing parties attempt to maintain their sense of self or self-identity and their self-esteem and a key question is, '*Who am I in this interaction?' or 'How may my self-identity be protected or repaired in this particular conflict?*'(p. 84). In this current study, the participants seemed to have been addressing the question of '*Who I am in this interaction?*' and became very conscious of self in the conflict interaction and engaged in self-questioning and self-

reflection as part of their sense making and in an attempt to maintain their sense of self. This was manifested in statements such as, "*...I felt so bad because I mean, I am not that kind of person'* (Avril) or *'And within the whole bacchanal, I was always asking and questioning myself 'Gary, is this you? Is this the type of person that you are?'*(Gary) and therefore supports what is posited by Hocker and Wilmot (2018).

It was also found that the intragroup conflict resulted in the majority of the participants experiencing internal struggle or conflict as they sought to maintain their identity and sense of self in the face of the conflict. This finding connects with the literature on cognitive dissonance. Festinger (1957) proposed three approaches that are likely to arouse cognitive dissonance (a psychological discomfort caused by internal inconsistency) which were decision-making and its consequences, forced compliance and exposure to discrepant information. This current study supports cognitive dissonance occurring as a result of decision making as this was part of the experience of some of the participants (Debra, Gary, Hannah) who had conflicting desires with respect to decision-making.

Further, research has shown that being a member of group is likely to arouse cognitive dissonance and that the social identity derived from group membership plays a significant part in this dissonance (Glasford, Pratto & Dovidio, 2008; Matz & Wood, 2005; Norton, Monin, Cooper & Hogg, 2003). Stone & Cooper (2001) underscored the importance of the balance between personal self and a social self in a group and the inconsistency that can occur between the information that one had about self (self-standards and values) and the social information in the group (socially normative information) that can arouse dissonance. As such, a group member can experience

dissonance by simply becoming aware that other in-group members have opposing

opinions (Matz & Wood, 2005) or can experience vicarious dissonance from witnessing

inconsistent behavior from in-group members (Norton et al., 2003).

Glasford et al., (2008) also found that dissonance occurs when there was

inconsistency between a group member's personal values and the behavior of the in-

group and this dissonance mediated the group member's disidentification with his group.

They referred to such dissonance as intragroup dissonance and illustrated that social

identity was at the heart of intragroup dissonance. The findings in the current study

support this literature since the internal conflict experienced by the participants was as a

result of internal inconsistencies for example, between the participant's thoughts and

behavior (Frank), conflicting emotions towards an in-group (Gary and Frank),

inconsistency between the participant's values or desires and the behavior of the group

(Gary). These inconsistencies appeared to have been as a result of trying to find a balance

between personal self and a social self in a group and wanting to stay true to themselves

in the conflict while maintaining their social identity within their groups. This was most

evident in the account of Gary who experienced disidentification with his group as a

result of this dissonance.

Another element of identity found in this current study was the concern that the

majority of participants had with respect to how they were being perceived or would be

perceived by others, in particular, their group members. This finding connects to the

literature on face and interpersonal conflict, where the issue of face has been found to

play an important role in interpersonal conflict (Folger et al., 2018; Oetzel & Ting-

Toomey, 2003; Oetzel, Ting-Toomey, Masumoto, Yokochi, Pan, Takai & Wilcox, 2001;

Tjosvold & Sun, 2000). The literature indicate that persons in conflict may be concerned with one's own image (self-face), another's image (other-face) or both one's image and that of the other (mutual face); the latter is a concern for the image of the relationship (Oetzel, Masumoto & Takai, 2000; Oetzel et al., 2001; Ting-Toomey & Kurogi, 1998). This is consistent with the concern for one's own image evident for example in the accounts of Frank where he indicated that *'a concern also would have been what is being said about me'*, as well as the concern for the image of the other evident in the account of Debra when she shared, *'...if it's going to attack your capabilities, I'd rather not tell you that. I'd rather not tell you, you know, you're not cutting it'*.

The literature further indicates that persons in conflict tend to use various communicative behaviors (facework) as a means of saving face or managing face concerns during a conflict (Oetzel et al., 2000). Facework can be used in conflict to escalate or avoid the conflict or to protect one's image (Oetzel et al., 2000). In their study, Oetzel et al. (2000) identified 13 facework behaviors in interpersonal conflicts between best friends and relative strangers. These were categorized into three factors namely: (1) dominating facework (aggression and defence of self), (2) avoiding facework (avoid, give in, involve third party and pretend), and (3) integrating facework (apologize, compromise, private discussion, talk about the problem). Two of these three factors, the dominant and the avoiding facework were evident in the experience of some of the participants. For example, the dominating facework which manifested in defence of self, is evident in the account of Barbara when she described how she attempted to assert some control or power in the group when the group leader assigned to her an insignificant part of the task which made her feel *'belittled'* and *'inadequate'* and *'...so I did my thing, like*

what I wanted as and then she had her suggestions and we sent it out and we told the

members to pick.'. The account given by Barbara of her behavior is in line with has been

described by Oetzel et al., (2002) as defending one's face in '*response to a threat from*

another person' (p. 413). Barbara did not want to think of herself the way she felt and did

not want her group members to perceive her as less than or inadequate. She therefore

asserted herself in an attempt to save face.

Oetzel et al., (2002) also posit that with avoiding facework, persons are concerned

with maintaining the relationship and so avoid directly dealing with the conflict whether

by giving in or accommodating, avoiding, pretending or involving a third party. As a

result, those persons are able to maintain the face of the other without potentially

threatening the face of self. This is in accord with the findings in this study where

avoidance and disingenuousness (pretending) were found to be methods of coping by

participants or group members with whom they interacted during the conflict (Master

Theme Six). Additionally, the resultant concern about relations that all the participants

either expressed or demonstrated by their actions in this study supports the association

between avoidance facework and concern for relations highlighted by Oetzel et al.,

(2002) in their study as both were also evident in this study and appeared to have been

related. This present study demonstrated that face-saving concerns of the participants

were relational because they were about how the participants wanted others to see them

as well as how the participants perceived they may have been seen by others during the

conflict. Therefore, the current study supports the literature and the view of Folger et al.,

(2018) that face concerns are essentially concerns about relationships.

In addition to supporting and reinforcing previous studies, this study also offers noteworthy insights that have either not been addressed or adequately addressed in the literature. One such insight is related to alienation, a subtheme which was discussed under Master Theme One. While the literature addresses the fact of alienation occurring during intragroup conflict (Livingstone & Lynch, 2000; Volet and Mansfield, 2006) it appears to be silent on the psychological effect of this phenomenon on students who may have been alienated or orchestrated the alienation of fellow group members during their intragroup conflict experience and the role (if any) that this phenomenon plays during the intragroup conflict experience. This current study unearthed that alienation, a significant aspect of the intragroup conflict experience of participants, evoked emotional distress, feelings of insignificance or inadequacy and rejection among the participants who were alienated as was seen with Avril, Barbara and Erica.

Additionally, participants who orchestrated the alienation of fellow group members experienced guilt (Debra and Gary) or experienced concern about being alienated themselves (Frank). Alienation therefore appeared to not only limit the opportunity of participants and fellow group members to benefit from the experiential learning of group work and the benefits of conflict but as this study demonstrates, it also had a negative psychological effect on those who were alienated by their group members as well as those who alienated group members. This negative effect is noteworthy when examining the lived experience of the phenomenon of intragroup conflict during group work and therefore should be explored further.

Another significant insight highlighted by this study is the possible role of passion for personal achievement in contributing to the growth of relationship conflict when there

is task conflict. In this current study, Master Theme Three 'Desiring to focus on the task, perform well and not be distracted by the conflict' demonstrates a link between task related issues becoming personal issues when participants took task related actions personally and reacted negatively. The literature has established an association between task conflict, relationship conflict and performance related factors such as feedback on performance, past performance and perceived team performance (Amason & Mooney,1999; Bayazit & Mannix, 2003; Guenter, van Emmerik, Schreurs, Kuypers, Iterson & Notelaers, 2016; Peterson & Behfar, 2003;). However, the role of a strong desire to perform well and its interaction with task conflict does not appear to have been explored or examined in any detail in the literature.

Guenter et al (2016) suggested, after finding that task conflicts relate to the growth in relationship conflict only when perceived team performance is low, that there was potential to explore the manner in which performance-related factors interact with task conflicts. Inspired by this suggestion, it is proffered that the finding in this current study of a passion for achievement, which was demonstrated by the desire to perform well and not be distracted by the conflict, may be another relevant performance-related factor that should be examined with respect to its interaction with task conflicts and any link with growth in relationship conflict. Such examination will provide further insight to the knowledge of the potential role of factors associated to task performance that has been the subject of previous studies (Simons & Peterson, 2000).

Findings in relation to the theoretical framework

Three theories form the theoretical framework for this study: group development theory, interpersonal conflict theory and intragroup conflict theory. These theories are the

lens used to give insight into lived experience of the participants of this study as they experience the phenomenon of intragroup conflict.

Group development theory explains that intragroup conflict is an integral part of a group's development. Bennis & Shepherd (1956) also posit that during such conflict groups experience obstacles to valid communication which prevent movement towards group cohesion and group shared goals. One such obstacle was withdrawal as the characteristic response to peers or in-group members (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956). This obstacle to valid communication is supported in this study as it was very evident in the lived experience of participants. It is presented in Master Theme One where participants shared experiences of negative communication in the group with group members not being on speaking terms and ignoring each other and the alienation and tension that resulted in some instances. Further, withdrawal or lack of engagement was also manifest in Master Theme Six as a coping mechanism of many of the participants and other in-group members with whom the participants interacted during the conflict therefore connecting what was postulated by Bennis & Shepherd (1956).

Additionally, group development theory highlights the intense emotionality that can exist during intragroup conflict. One such emotion acknowledged as an element of group interaction is anxiety experienced by group members (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956; Bion, 1961; Tuckman, 1965). This anxiety and stress can arise from the uncertainty of group experience including the newness of the group, lack of direction and specificity of goals of the group (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956) and interpersonal issues within the group such as intimacy, self-esteem, individuality and authority; tension between task-oriented behavior and people-oriented behavior (Bennis & Shepherd, 1956; Bion, 1961; Smith,

2001; Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan et al. 2003). Other emotions identified during the

intragroup conflict are feelings of anger, hostility, disappointment and disenchantment

(Bennis & Shepherd, 1965; Bion, 1961; Smith, 2001; Tuckman, 1965; Wheelan et al.

2003). According to Bion (1961) many of these negative emotions occur because the

issues and concerns which can deal with the anxiety being experienced, are not solved

and so that anxiety remains. The intense emotionality advanced in group development

theory is supported in this study in Master Theme Five which highlighted prominent

negative emotions experienced by the participants during the conflict. Anxiety or

apprehension featured as a significant negative emotion that characterized the experience

of all the participants manifested also as stress, distress, nervousness, uneasiness. This

study also connects to group development theory with respect to other negative emotions

uncovered such as anger and discouragement presented in Master Theme Five and

therefore reinforces that intense emotionality is a very significant aspect of the lived

experience of the participants during intragroup conflict.

The operation of two realms or dimensions in group work is also advanced as an

aspect of group development theory in which it is suggested that the relevant task in

group work is negatively impacted by intragroup conflict. This aspect of group

development theory connects to this current study. Tuckman (1965) emphasized the

concurrent operation of two realms, the social realm in which group members related to

each other interpersonally, and the task realm where group members' interaction was

related to the relevant task. He argued that in the storming stage when conflict occurred

in the social realm, group members in the task realm responded emotionally to the task

requirements resisting group influence and task demands. This resistance therefore takes

the group away from the relevant task. Bion (1961) also argued a two-dimensional aspect to group development with groups operating a 'work group' being the conscious task oriented dimension of group activity cognizant of its purpose, and a 'basic assumption group', being the unconscious psychological and emotional dimension of group activity in which the group is acting upon erroneous and irrational assumptions. It is argued that conflict which occurs in the dimension of the basic assumption group creates tension with group work because of its tendency is away from the task.

This notion about the conflict detracting from the task was a very significant concern for participants during their intragroup conflict experience and is evident in third thematic finding of this study. Master Theme Three captures the desire of participants to focus on the task so that they could do well, that is, according to group development theory, the participants were task oriented, desiring the group to operate in the 'task realm' or as a 'work group'. Master Theme Three also captures the participants' desire not to be distracted by the conflict and the conflict issues which they viewed as detracting from the task which according to group development theory, meant that they demonstrated a desire not to operate in the 'social realm' or as a 'basic assumption group' which they viewed as detracting from the task. It also provides an explanation for the approach of participants in avoiding or not wanting to engage in the conflict which was a dominant feature of the experience of all the participants described in Master Theme Six. This explanation may have been best expressed by Hannah who seemed have felt that if her group avoided conflict there would be stability in the group because she was concerned that instability caused by the conflict would prevent her group from completing its task.

Barki and Hartwick (2004) presented a two-dimensional framework of interpersonal conflict in which they identified constituent properties (the principal cognitive, affective and behavioral elements) of interpersonal conflict and constituent targets (objects) of the conflict. The constituent properties identified as perceived disagreement, perceived interference and negative emotion connect with some of thematic findings in this study. For example, the second thematic finding which gave voice to the difficulty expressed by the participants presents perceived disagreement or dissonance which contributed to the difficulty experienced by the participants. Such disagreement included perceived disagreement in respect of member participation, responsibilities, allocation of work, scheduling, priorities and academic goals, abilities and skills.

Further, the behavior of group members which gave rise to perceived disagreement, for example, social loafing and free riding, was perceived by participants as behavior that would thwart or interfere with the attainment of their goals and with those of the group. This is in line with the interference that is identified by Barki and Hartwick (2004) as another constituent property on interpersonal conflict. Such behavior is also captured in Master Theme Two which described the difficulty and hardship experienced by participants on account of members who they felt were uncooperative, or challenging, or not contributing equally or who had different priorities. Noteworthy in relation to connecting to the constituent property of interference presented by Barki and Harwick (2004), is the strong desire that was uncovered in this study with respect to all the participants desiring to do well and obtain good grades, and their major concern about the actions of group members interfering with these goals (Master Theme Three). This

strong desire led to the most of the participants taking the behavior of in-group members in relation to the task personally where such behavior resulted in negative emotions because it was perceived by the participants as interfering with their goal to do well and get a good grade.

Additionally, in this study, the negative emotions experienced by the participants and described in Master Theme Five, are consistent with the negative emotions highlighted by Barki and Hartwick (2004) as a constituent property of interpersonal conflict. The feelings of anger, anxiety and frustration uncovered in this study accord with negative emotions that Barki and Hartwick (2004) identified as being most prominently featured in the literature associated with interpersonal conflict. This study also shows the diverse negative emotions can be experienced by students as they experience interpersonal conflict such as hopelessness, stress, resentment, dejection, hurt, feeling exploited all of which are described in Master Theme Five. Other negative emotions uncovered were powerlessness described in Master Theme Four and confusion captured in Master Theme Seven.

Based on the framework of Barki and Hartwick (2004), interpersonal conflict can be about the content of the task, the process of the task or about interpersonal incompatibilities or all three. All three targets were evident in the current study and were manifest throughout the findings. For example, in Master Theme One, Erica shared about how communication with an in-group member was negatively impacted because of a difference in perspective about the content of the task as well as in respect to the process of the task. In Master Theme Two, Avril shared about conflict that occurred because of different priorities and personalities, and several of the participants shared about conflict

that occurred because free riding and work allocation, scheduling differences (task process) in Master Themes Two, Three, Four and Five.

Also, according to the model of Barki and Hartwick (2004) the intensity of the intragroup conflict among the students is very likely influenced by the nature of the target or targets of the interpersonal conflict. This was evident in this study where, based on the accounts of the participants, the conflict seemed to have been more intense with respect to how the task should be done by group members (the task process) rather than when there was conflict with respect to what should be done (the content of task). Thus, issues relating to the process of the task such as work allocation, member participation and free riding, were major concerns shared by participants in the current study and pervaded the thematic findings.

Intragroup conflict theory underscores the complexity and multilevel nature of intragroup conflict. It categorizes intragroup conflict into three main types – task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict. A fourth type of conflict, status conflict, has more recently been introduced. The typology of intragroup conflict into task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict is consistent with the targets of conflict (task, task process and interpersonal relationship) presented in the second dimension of the framework for interpersonal conflict postulated by Barki and Hartwick (2004). According to intragroup conflict theory, more than one type of conflict may occur at the same time within a group. This finds support in our study whereas previously indicated in the discussion of the framework of Barki and Hartwick (2004), the lived experience of all the participants, involved more than one type of conflict at the same time. For example, Avril experienced all at the same time, conflict issues with respect to the task and what was

required to be done by the group as well as interpersonal issues such as different priorities, work styles and values. Similarly, the experience of Frank and Gary involved dealing with conflict issues relating to the task process as well as interpersonal issues all at the same time. Erica's experience also involved task, process and relationship conflict occurring at the same time in her group. The presence of the various types of conflict in the experience of the participants reinforces the complex nature of intragroup conflict postulated in intragroup conflict theory. However, while the account of all the participants in this study, revealed the existence of task conflict, process conflict and relationship conflict which pervaded the thematic findings, the current study did not unearth the fourth type of intragroup conflict, status conflict.

Intragroup conflict theory also highlights the effects and interaction of the various types of conflict and posits that intragroup conflict can lead to both positive and negative effects on group effectiveness and performance depending on the type of conflict and any interaction that may exists. It is argued that task conflict, generally, may have positive effect on group performance and collaboration, but when not resolved, it very often evolves into relationship conflict which then has a negative impact on group process. Process conflict occurring early during the group's interaction can have lasting negative impact on group collaboration and if not managed at the beginning, was found likely to develop into relationship conflict in the group's subsequent interaction with associated negative emotions. It is posited that relationship conflict negatively impacts group effectiveness and collaboration because negative emotions engendered a shift in focus from the task to interpersonal issues.

The negative impact of the conflict on group collaboration and group effectiveness was a major aspect of the lived experience of all the participants and pervaded all of the thematic findings. Participants described issues with respect to the task and the process of the task leading to issues with respect to relations with in-group members. This was quite evident in the account of Christine when she said described that the conflict with respect to the assignment (the task) "*went beyond the assignment and it got personal*". The interaction and effect of the various types of conflict is very present particularly in Master Theme One which describes the negative relations and interactions that resulted from conflict issues related to the task and the task process as well as Master Theme Five which captured the negative emotions experienced by the participants. These emotions are consistent with the negative emotions associated with relationship conflict.

Additionally, according to intragroup conflict, task conflict escalates into relationship conflict as a result of cognitive misattributions or inappropriate emotional and behavioral responses (Simons and Peterson, 2000). Such misattribution may account for participants taking the actions of in-group members relative to the task personally described in Master Theme Three and provides an explanation as to how task related issues escalated to relational issues. Intragroup conflict theory also accounts for the concern of participants not to be distracted by the conflict. It can be argued that this concern arose because as the conflict escalated from task related issues, the negative emotions that resulted engendered an undesired shift in focus from the task to interpersonal issues which participants viewed as being detrimental to the task. Another reason for the task related issues escalating into relationship conflict is because these issues whether task or process issues, from the account of the participants, were not

resolved or effectively managed. In fact, participants showed a strong desire for third party intervention to resolve or assist in managing their conflict, which was captured in Master Theme Two and which for the most part was not provided based on the accounts of the participants.

Implications of the findings

The findings from this study have important implications for conflict resolution practitioners particularly those who practice in higher education institutions as well as for educators. One such implication is that the participants' experience of intragroup conflict appear to them to be overwhelmingly negative filled with negative interactions, negative emotions, negative attitudes and perceptions, difficulty, perceived injustice, lack of desired assistance and concern. Accordingly, based on the participants' negative experience, there appears to be a general lack of appreciation among them for the experiential learning of group work and group dynamics and for the other benefits that have been identified in the literature that can be gained from group work. This is an important implication for practice having regard to the prevalence and increasing use of group work in higher education.

Educators and conflict resolution practitioners must be aware of and have insight to what is experienced by students so that they can make meaningful interventions and assistance can be provided. For example, there must be awareness that students are being alienated or alienating themselves while engaging in group work and the psychological effect of such alienation on students or that within the intragroup conflict, students are experiencing inner conflict and struggles as they attempt to balance their personal identity with their social identity. Further, educators and conflict resolution practitioners should

be equipped with such knowledge so as to prepare the students with awareness and to provide them with the requisite knowledge, and training and skills so as to be able to gain the benefits of group work. This also means that educators who use group work as part of their curriculum should be trained in conflict resolution skills and that students should have access to educators trained in conflict resolution skills or conflict resolution practitioners who can provide training and who can empower and support them as they experience the phenomenon of intragroup conflict.

Another implication based on the findings of this study is that participants appear to believe that they are not equipped to deal with intragroup conflict, that they are powerless to influence any positive change and need assistance. Thus, it appears that they need to be empowered with the skills to manage conflict as they engage in group work. This is important for educators and those in the field of conflict studies to note. In addition and related to this implication is the finding which indicate that the participants primarily avoided conflict as a means of coping with the conflict. The implication of this finding is that that by their avoidance of the conflict or lack of engagement during the conflict, the participants would not have been learning to collaborate, negotiate or develop conflict resolution skills while doing their group projects. This is important insight for practitioners and educators because these are skills which are very applicable to the reality of the work environment and need to be developed by students in preparation for the world of work.

A further implication based on the findings is that there appears to be a need for educators (instructors, lecturers and tutors) to play a greater role in group work and to provide greater support and guidance as students navigate the intricacies of group

dynamics and challenges of intragroup conflict. Such intervention can facilitate the development of mediating factors identified in the literature such as trust, conflict management strategies and emotion regulation that can work towards students having a positive and useful experience while engaging in group work notwithstanding the challenges of the intragroup conflict. It can also harness the benefit of task conflict which has been found to positively impact collaboration and prevent such conflict from evolving into relationship conflict which can have a negative impact on group process as was quite evident in this current study.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study the following recommendations are proffered:

1. **Training for educators by conflict resolution practitioners.** Educators utilizing group work in their curriculum should obtain basic training in group process, group dynamics, interpersonal and intragroup conflict, conflict resolution skills and strategies and any other related areas. Such training will equip educators to assist students who have similar experiences to those described by the participants during intragroup conflict. Such training can also facilitate the implementation of effective and relevant strategies that can empower the students during intragroup conflict and create opportunities for student learning and development which can be transferred to the work environment.

2. **Training for students prior to and during group work.** Educators who utilize group work in their curriculum should provide or facilitate training prior to the group work so that students can acquire knowledge about interpersonal and intragroup conflict in its various forms, group development process, and group

dynamics as well as develop conflict resolution skills and strategies. A part of this training should involve the benefits that can be gained from conflict and from group work. This can assist in empowering students with knowledge and skills to deal with group dynamics and intragroup conflict. In addition, during group projects, instructors can provide practical instructions or demonstrations on aspects of intragroup conflict or group dynamics, emotion regulation and other related matters that may prove to be useful resources to students as they engage in group work and experience intragroup conflict. Such training will enhance the learning environment for students and can promote group effectiveness and performance not only in the academic environment but ultimately in the work environment. It can also support student appreciation for group work and group process of which conflict is often a part.

3. **Meaningful intervention of neutral parties**. Educators should closely guide and monitor group work so as to ensure that this aspect of the learning process is a positive and beneficial to students and to provide or facilitate meaningful intervention where assistance is needed. As such, educators should be available to provide guidance or assistance where groups are struggling, engaging in negative interactions or 'stuck' as described by Irene or having any experiences as the participants were found to have had in this study. Such intervention should include motivating and empowering students to work through the conflict issues rather than avoiding them so that students can develop the requisite skills to deal with conflict as well as addressing relational concerns. Educators can also utilise neutral third parties such as conflict resolution practitioners to coach students

through their experiences so that there is learning, development and support as students experience conflict. This study provides insight into those experiences so that there can be timely, valuable, and effective intervention.

4. **Reconsideration and possible redesign of the assessment system for group work**. The findings of this study seem to suggest that group projects done by all of the participants were subject to summative assessments where a final grade was awarded for the project. Many of the participants appeared to have felt that this grading system was unfair as it did not take into consideration the group process and the non-contribution, free-riding or inequitable contribution of group members or other challenges faced during the group work. It is recommended that the assessment system for group work be reconsidered and be redesigned to address the perceived injustice that many of the participants appeared to have experienced by the grading system utilized for their group work. The assessment system for group work should also consist of assessment of the group process and not just group outcome. The assessment of the group process could be formative assessments where instructors can provide meaningful feedback to group members as they do their group projects. Such feedback can be used to improve the group process and to develop skills in the students. This will also assist in empowering students and assist students when they are challenged with having to deal with conflict and the task.

Contribution to the field of conflict resolution

This study is significant because it addresses a dearth in the literature with respect to the detailed subjective experience of students, in particular Caribbean students in

higher education, who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group projects which are graded and gives voice to their experience. It is also significant because it adds to the knowledge in the literature and provides richness and depth to the existing literature on intragroup conflict and group work. Therefore, this study advances knowledge in the field because it provides valuable insight to conflict resolution practitioners and educators in higher education into the intragroup conflict experiences of students in the Caribbean. The findings of this study are able to heighten the awareness of conflict resolution practitioners and educators in higher education as they encounter students who experience the phenomenon of intragroup conflict. This heightened awareness can inform and transform the manner in which conflict resolution practitioners and educators deal with students as they experience the phenomenon.

Limitations

The sample size of this study was by design a relatively small sample because my intent was to provide a rich and deep understanding of the lived experience of the participants and their sense making while experiencing the phenomenon of intragroup conflict during group work. The use of a small sample size is in line with the phenomenological approach adopted in this study and facilitated a detailed and an in-depth analysis of the experiences of the participants from which I was able to unearth findings that gave voice to their experiences. While these findings cannot be generalized they can allow for connections to be made to the existing literature, adding to depth of understanding. Additionally, the findings in this study are limited to the understanding, perception and perspectives of the participants in their own settings. They are not

representative of the experience of students in the settings of their educational institutions or in all settings.

Future Research

The findings suggest considerations for future research into the phenomenon of intragroup conflict in an educational setting and how it is experienced. Research should be conducted with respect to the findings which brought added insights such as the psychological effect of alienation within groups and how this interacts with intragroup conflict as well as the role of a strong desire for achievement or performance and its interaction with task conflict. Also, several similar studies to this current study can be conducted in other educational settings in the Caribbean and sites other than the Republic of Trinidad and Tobago. Additionally, there is the potential for quantitative studies to be conducted which can draw ideas from the findings of this current study. Such quantitative research will be on a large sample population and can quantify and determine the extent to which intragroup conflict is similarly experienced by students in other educational institutions in the Caribbean.

Conclusion

The aim of this study was conducted to gain an in-depth understanding of the lived experiences of Caribbean students in higher education who experience intragroup conflict as they engage in group work. The participants were nine students from various Caribbean islands who were studying at the higher educational institutions and who had experienced intragroup conflict while engaging in group work. In this study, my aim was to give voice to the participants by describing their lived experiences and how they understood or made sense of these experiences. Accordingly, I used interpretative

phenomenological analysis to gain insight into the phenomenon and a theoretical framework based on three theories: interpersonal theory, group development theory and intragroup conflict theory. The study unearth the following master themes: 1) negative interactions with resultant concern; 2) difficulty and injustice without desired assistance; 3) desiring to perform well, focus on the task and not the conflict; 4) feeling powerless and wanting to give up or giving up; 5) negative emotions, attitudes and perceptions; 6) coping with the conflict: cognizant but not engaging; 7) identity and perception: who I am and who I am to others. These findings are consistent with previous research and literature and provide valuable insight, add richness and depth to the already existing literature on intragroup conflict. It also gives voice to students in higher education from the Caribbean who experience intragroup conflict during group work and provides some new insights which adds to the existing knowledge in the literature on group work and intragroup conflict.

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