

# Journal of Student Affairs

at New York University  
Volume IX | 2013

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The Editorial Board of the *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University* promotes the submission of articles that address issues of critical interest to the NYU community and among the larger community of higher education and student affairs professionals. Articles that explore topical issues, suggest innovative programming, and embark upon original research are encouraged. The opinions and attitudes expressed within the Journal do not necessarily reflect those of the Editorial Board.

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Institutions across the country have started implementing senior year experience programs. The senior year experience is a flexible and evolving concept; each program developed is specific to the institution and the needs of their senior students (Eckel, 1994; Gardner, 1999; Gardner et al., 1998). The purpose of this paper is to share findings related to the effects enrollment in the elective Senior Year Experience (SYE) course at a large, public institution has on seniors' attitudes toward the institution's efforts to prepare them for graduation and their expressed dispositions to stay connected to the institution through the institution's alumni association. Research indicated that compared with non-participants, seniors who had previously taken or were currently enrolled in the SYE course were found to have greater affinity to the Alumni Association, expressed more positive feelings regarding the institution's role in preparing them to leave the university, reported feeling more prepared to leave the institution, and expressed greater feelings of connectedness to the university.

Keywords: senior year experience, seniors, prepared, graduation, transitions, university

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The purpose of this article is to analyze the effect of World War II (WWII) on women's experience in higher education with a focus on the science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) disciplines. In order to explore this idea, research was done examining the history of the higher education curriculum available to women up to and including the Second World War. Examples are provided of the visible change in the courses available to women during WWII from traditionally female-oriented subjects in the liberal arts and humanities to the STEM subjects that aided in the WWII wartime efforts. The impact of WWII and the women studying the STEM fields is also discussed. Recommendations are then offered on how universities and colleges can continue to support and encourage female students who are interested in pursuing their academic interests in the STEM fields conclude this paper.

Keywords: World War II, STEM, women in higher education, female students, history

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Former foster care youth (FFY) comprise a student population seldom addressed in student affairs literature. As a group, FFY face unique barriers in their access to and persistence in college due to their lack of traditional support systems and sometimes traumatic personal histories. Consequently, FFY access higher education at much lower rates than non-foster care students. This paper reviews the literature on FFY in higher education by first detailing the population's unique obstacles and then examining the governmental policies and educational programs aimed to improve access and degree attainment. By educating the higher education community about this vulnerable population and sharing information about progressive programs, this paper serves to draw attention to this often invisible population and to encourage higher education institutions to provide greater support to FFY in their own colleges and universities.

Keywords: Postsecondary education, higher education, foster, disadvantaged youth, access to education

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Since “The Real World” hit the small screen in 1992, the concept of watching people exhibit their lives on television has quickly exploded into one of the fastest growing franchises in the entertainment industry. Though several reality television programs currently broadcasted involve themes surrounding relationships, competition, and physical prowess, shows geared towards the African American community have consistently promoted images of hypersexuality, profanity, and violence. From *Flavor of Love* to *The Basketball Wives* series, Black women consuming these works are continuously presented with conflicting representations of dating, relationships, and the value of Black women. Low-income Black undergraduate women attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) who watch reality television are particularly susceptible to these messages because of institutional factors that challenge Black women at PWIs, such as a lack in mentorship and cultural representation. This essay discusses how constant encounters with these portrayals of Black Love may influence how low-income Black college women select their role models and engage in romantic relationships.

Keywords: Black, undergraduate, women, reality television

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## LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

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Welcome to the ninth edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs (JoSA) at New York University*.

What a year this has been for JoSA! Our mission is to produce a high-quality, academically rigorous, peer-reviewed journal that explores the breadth and depth of the field of student affairs. We believe the following thought-provoking articles will add substance and integrity to our community of scholars and practitioners. It is our hope the content you read will inspire and lead to further academic inquiries to benefit our field.

The 2013 edition truly represents how dedicated and diligent this year's editors and authors were to making the journal come to fruition. Hurricane Sandy in October and Snowstorm Nemo in February presented us with some challenges, but the JoSA spirit was not to be discouraged. The Executive Editorial Board pulled together as a team, rearranging deadlines and schedules to fit the needs of our authors and editors. The weather patterns also did not dishearten the authors and editors—their consistent enthusiasm to produce a high quality journal was contagious. The determination of everyone involved in JoSA is strongly reflected in this publication.

The Executive Editorial Board was truly a collegial team of brilliant individuals: Jessica Lam, Content Editor; David Sun, Copy Editor, Laura Osborne, Development and Publicity Manager; and Naomi Karp, Production Editor. I am so thankful to have shared this journey with you all.

It is with great pleasure I introduce to you, on behalf of the 2012-2013 Executive Editorial Board, editors and authors, the ninth edition of the *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University*.

Warmest Regards,

Best Regards,

*Brigitta Vieyra*

Editor-in-Chief

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# Senior Year Experience: An Emerging Course to Transition Beyond Graduation

**Jennifer Lease Butts, Catherine M. Carter, Thomas L. Dickens, Daniel J. Doerr, Jessica N. Emig, Kristen R. Glines, Fany D. Hannon, Katie J. Michel**

Higher education institutions across the country have started implementing senior year experience programs to assist students in preparing for life beyond college. Emerging program curricula might cover topics such as buying a car, interpreting a lease agreement, logistics of graduation, and involvement as future alumni. The purpose of this paper is to share findings related to the effects enrollment in the elective Senior Year Experience (SYE) course at a large, public institution has on seniors' expressed dispositions toward the institution's efforts to prepare them for graduation and their attitudes to stay connected to the institution through the institution's Alumni Association.

## **Senior Year Experience**

Henscheid (2008a, 2008b) explains that institutional efforts to help seniors prepare for society revolve around capstone courses, preparation programs, and opportunities for reflection. A majority of the senior year experience courses focus on preparing students for potential careers by addressing graduate school applications, business etiquette, and conducting job searches. Senior year courses also offer opportunities for students to reflect on their undergraduate experiences in order to develop an understanding of broad themes that incorporate all of their learned knowledge and skills (Gardner, 1999; Gardner et al., 1998; Henscheid, 2008a, 2008b).

The SYE course at the university in this study is a one-credit elective offered during both the fall and spring semesters. It delivers weekly content from experts on a number of topics in lecture format followed by small group discussion sections. Topics typically addressed in SYE include résumé writing, job searching, personal financial management, and transition issues. Discussions provide an opportunity to process and engage with the material presented in lecture.

## **Methodology**

The findings in this paper present a subset of results from a larger study conducted by the authors of this paper. This larger study attempted to gain a better understanding of the effects of broad programmatic efforts directed at senior engagement and alumni development at a large public

institution.

While this report will focus on the quantitative results related to participation in an SYE course, the larger assessment study used an IRB approved mixed methods research approach involving both quantitative and qualitative methods in order to provide a widespread context (Patten, 2009). The research team compiled a list of all students who had earned 86+ credits and had the graduation date of Spring 2012 or Summer 2012 and considered those students the “seniors.” Researchers sought to select an unbiased sample by giving every member of the senior population an equal chance of being included in the study. Students who partook in the study volunteered to complete an online survey (Patten, 2009).

Since previous research has not directly addressed the research questions of the current study, the researchers created all of the questions specifically for this assessment which included a survey instrument consisting of 38 close-ended and Likert scale questions, demographic questions, and two informed consent forms (Patton, 1990). Quantitatively, these researcher-designed instruments intended to measure student knowledge about, participation in, and feelings toward senior programming.

Researchers determined that the survey respondents adequately represented the institution’s senior population and that the quantitative results were statistically significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) as the study obtained more than the necessary sample size of 364 participants (Patten, 2009). Respondents’ self-identified demographics also matched the proportions of those of the larger university population. Researchers cross-tabulated the survey responses to discover differences based on a variety of characteristics including gender, ethnicity, specific school/college, and participation in SYE courses (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

To ensure the strength of the findings, the researchers performed triangulation, the technique of validating data through cross verification. This method incorporated multiple investigators, participants, and collection methods, which provided an extensive, yet generalized perspective (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Additionally, researchers remained aware of personal subjectivities while conducting the assessment and strived to ensure that research was credible and of strong quality (Patten, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

## Results

The email response rate to the online survey sent to 6894 students was 9.96%, or 687 seniors. Of the students who responded, 7.09% of the target population, or 489 seniors, met the criteria for the study and completed the survey. Of these qualified respondents, 15 were enrolled in

### *Senior Year Experience*

SYE in the fall 2011, and 31 were registered to take the course in Spring 2012. In the fall 2011 semester, SYE enrollment consisted of 11 discussion sections with a combined enrollment of 127 students. Enrollment in the spring 2012 semester consisted of 12 discussion sections with a combined enrollment of 174 students. The response rate to the online survey was 11.8% for seniors enrolled in SYE for Fall 2011 and 17.8% for seniors enrolled in SYE for Spring 2012.

**Feelings about the university.** There are several significant findings related to feelings about the institution and its role in preparing seniors to leave the institution. Of those seniors who had completed SYE in Fall 2011, more agreed or strongly agreed that they felt connected to the institution (86.67%) than both those who were enrolled to take SYE in Spring 2012 (77.42%) and those who did not take SYE (79.21%). Additionally, seniors who elected to enroll in SYE in Spring 2012 were less likely to agree or strongly agree that they felt connected to the institution (77.42%) than students who did not take SYE (79.21%) as indicated in Table 1.

A similar pattern was seen in the degree to which seniors agreed or strongly agreed that they felt prepared to leave the university and enter the real world (see Table 2). Of those seniors who had completed SYE in Fall 2011, more agreed or strongly agreed that they felt prepared to leave the university (64.29%) than both those who were enrolled to take SYE in Spring 2012 (41.94%) and those who did not take SYE (61.53%). Seniors who enrolled in SYE in spring 2012 were again the group least likely to agree or strongly agree. Furthermore, 0% of seniors who took SYE in Fall 2011 felt unprepared to leave the university and enter the real world.

In general, seniors who enrolled in SYE felt more positively toward the role of the institution in preparing them to graduate. 60% of seniors who had taken SYE in Fall 2011 and 58.07% of seniors enrolled in Spring 2012 agreed or strongly agreed that the university was helpful in preparing them to transition out of college as compared to 47.25% agreement among seniors who did not take SYE (see Table 3). Compared with 36.6% of seniors who did not take SYE, 66.67% of seniors enrolled in Fall SYE and 50% of seniors enrolled in SYE in Spring 2012 agreed or strongly agreed that the university had been helpful in managing their exit from the university as indicated in Table 3.

**Alumni Relations.** Understanding of alumni involvement and attitudes toward the Alumni Association were used as a criteria to evaluate desire to stay connected to the university. While responses varied based on the semester in which seniors enrolled in SYE, respondents who took SYE felt more knowledgeable about the Alumni Association and expressed more

positive feelings about future involvement than those who did not take SYE (see Table 4). 26.67% of seniors who enrolled SYE in Fall 2011 and 33.33% of seniors who enrolled in SYE in Spring 2012 agreed or strongly agreed that they felt knowledgeable about the Alumni Association compared to 16.59% who did not take SYE. 66.67% of seniors who enrolled in SYE in Fall 2011 and 72.41% who enrolled in SYE in Spring 2012 agreed or strongly agreed that the Alumni Association would help them stay connected to the university compared to 43.98% who did not take SYE. Table 4 further indicates that 33.3% of seniors enrolled in SYE in Fall 2011 and 35.48% of seniors enrolled in Spring 2012 agreed that they would be regularly involved in the Alumni Association after graduation compared to 18.83% of those not enrolled in SYE.

### **Discussion**

Across the questions related to seniors' feelings of connectedness to the university, preparedness, and the institution's role in preparing seniors, the group that expressed the most positive responses was students who had completed SYE in Fall 2011. This is noteworthy in that the group who responded least favorably to these questions was seniors enrolled in SYE in Spring 2012, but who were yet to complete the course. Seniors enrolled in SYE in Spring 2012 also responded less favorably than students who did not take SYE. These findings indicate SYE is successfully targeting those students most in need of an intervention, which once completed, leads to stronger feelings of satisfaction with the institution's role in preparing students for life after graduation. It is also noteworthy that the students who had completed the SYE course were the only group of respondents from which no one answered disagree or strongly disagree when asked if the university had prepared them for the real world.

Seniors enrolling in SYE have greater knowledge of the Alumni Association and a stronger belief that they will stay connected to the institution through this organization than seniors not enrolling in SYE. Those seniors electing to take SYE have greater affinity to the Alumni Association than those electing not to take the course.

### **Limitations**

There are limitations of the study related to semester enrollments. When inquiring about SYE participation, the survey offered only Fall 2011 and Spring 2012 as options, leaving out those who had December 2011 graduation dates and could have taken SYE in Spring 2011. Additional participants who had completed the Senior Year Experience course would provide further information about how the course

### *Senior Year Experience*

prepares students to leave the institution. Another notable limitation generated from the larger study is the number of seniors who participated in the qualitative portion of the study. The researchers attempted to gain information from 20 participants, but were only able to meet with 17 students. Not reaching the desired amount of participants necessitated that the researchers eliminate one focus group in favor of several individual interviews. As focus groups provide an environment in which students may build off of one another's ideas, this may have prevented additional themes from emerging in the qualitative portion of the original study.

### **Implications for Practice**

An elective SYE class can support several important institutional goals. This course can increase the degree to which seniors feel prepared to leave the institution and the degree to which they have positive feelings toward the institution's role in those feelings. It presents an opportunity for seniors who may feel less prepared to take advantage of a support structure. Having such a course is one way an institution can identify and target seniors who may feel less prepared or feel that the university has not played a role in preparing them to transition out of the university. As such, an institution could benefit from having sufficient enrollment capacity in the SYE course to meet demands.

Seniors electing to take SYE have greater affinity to the Alumni Association than those who do not. Identifying those students who are participating in an elective SYE class and sharing this information with the Alumni Association can be a successful strategy to maximize the success of young alumni development efforts.

### **Future Research**

The small number of respondents who had participated in SYE limits the generalizability of findings related to the outcomes of the SYE course. In order to increase the number of participants who have taken the SYE course in a future study, one might consider recruiting students directly from the SYE course. In addition, an assessment should be done on students who have taken the course and have graduated to investigate long-term implications related to satisfaction with the institution and alumni engagement. Additional qualitative research should also be done to better understand the relationship between participation in the SYE course and the quantitative results reported. Finally, it is also recommended that research be conducted regarding how environmental factors, in terms of institutional type and location, may influence the effectiveness of the SYE course.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper is to share findings related to the effects enrollment in the elective SYE course at a large public institution have on seniors' attitudes toward the institution's efforts to prepare them for graduation and their expressed dispositions to stay connected to the institution through the institution's alumni association.

Research indicated that compared with non-participants, seniors who had previously taken or were currently enrolled in the SYE course were found to have greater affinity to the Alumni Association, expressed more positive feelings regarding the institution's role in preparing them to leave the university, reported feeling more prepared to leave the institution and expressed greater feelings of connectedness to the university.

Findings provided multiple implications for practice including the recognition of an elective SYE course as a device for institutions to identify seniors who may feel less prepared to leave the institution and the importance of partnering with alumni development offices to target SYE participants with young alumni development efforts. Continuing this research is important as exit management efforts from institutions aim to increase positive feelings of students as they leave the university and hopefully become engaged alumni.

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Table 1  
*Feelings of Connectedness to the University*

	I feel connected to the University.		
n=respondents	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
SYE Fall 2011 n=15	86.67%	6.67%	6.67%
SYE Spring 2012 n=31	77.42%	12.9%	9.68%
Did not take SYE n=380	79.21%	11.84%	8.95%

Table 2  
*Feelings of Preparedness to Enter the Real World*

	I feel prepared to leave the University and enter the real world.		
n=respondents	Agree/Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/Strongly Disagree
SYE Fall 2011 n=14	64.29%	35.71%	0%
SYE Spring 2012 n=31	41.94%	32.26%	25.81%
Did not take SYE n=377	61.53%	20.42%	18.04%



Table 3

*Feelings of University's Role in Helping Prepare Students to Leave*

	I feel that the University has been helpful in preparing me for my transition out of college.	I feel that the University has been helpful in managing my exit from the university.				
n=respondents	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Agree/ Strongly Agree
SYE Fall 2011 n=15	60%	26.67%	13.34%	66.67%	13.33%	20%
SYE Spring 2012 n=31	58.07%	12.90%	29.03%	50%	30%	20%
Did not take SYE n=383, 377	47.25%	25.46%	27.3%	36.6%	29.97%	33.42%

Table 4

*Feelings of Alumni Association Knowledge and Involvement*

	I feel knowledgeable about the Alumni Association.	I feel that the Alumni Association will help me stay connected to the university.	I believe that I will be regularly involved in the Alumni Association after I graduate.						
n=respondents	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree	Agree/ Strongly Agree	Neutral	Disagree/ Strongly Disagree
<b>SYE Fall 2011</b> n=15	26.67%	40%	33.33%	66.67%	33.33%	0%	33.33%	40.03%	26.67%
<b>SYE Spring 2012</b> n=30	33.33%	23.33%	43.33%	72.41%	17.25%	10.34%	35.48%	32.26%	32.26%
<b>Did not take SYE</b> n=377-382	16.59%	27.97%	57.26%	43.98%	39.53%	16.5%	18.83%	41.11%	40.05%



# The Evolution of Women in Higher Education: How WWII Encouraged Women to Study STEM

**Caroline Cristal**

While the evolution of American higher education has been a relatively short one, it is important to understand how the system has been influenced by history. Many aspects of contemporary American higher education were shaped by the events of World War II (WWII). During the war both students and higher education institutions experienced their roles change and shift within the context of American society. As male students were deployed and the need for stateside aid increased, higher education institutions changed the courses available to their female students. This article discusses this change, and how it contributed to the increase in opportunities for women to study the science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) disciplines. To highlight this academic shift, a brief historical background is provided identifying a woman's place in higher education leading up to the Second World War. The move to include women in the STEM subjects as a way to aid with wartime efforts is then discussed, followed by the influence the Servicemen's Readjustment Act, or G.I. Bill, had on decreasing female participation in higher education and in STEM. To conclude, the current unequal presence of women in the STEM fields is discussed and recommendations are offered on how higher education institutions can continue to support and encourage female students interested in pursuing academic interests in the STEM fields.

## **Women in Higher Education: A Brief History**

A common thread in the history of women in American higher education is the control that others had over what they learned. For example, in the mid-1800s, traditional Southern groups were concerned about sending their daughters away to Northern colleges where they might be exposed to values drastically different from their own (Thelin, 2004). To ensure that women were not influenced by alternative beliefs, colleges close to home were established where traditional religious and regional values could be incorporated into the curriculum (Thelin, 2004). The standard belief was that a woman's place was at home, so it was not necessary for women to have an education that would require them to deal with the public sphere (Kerber, 1988). Therefore, while women were allowed to pursue advanced academic work, the focus for female students was on preparing them for conventional feminine roles such as homemaking, being a wife and mother, and supervising (Thelin, 2004). Since women did not have control over their own course selection,

the only option was to enroll in the aforementioned types of courses.

During the late 1800s, institutions such as Cornell University and the University of California allowed women to enroll. However, the primary courses available to women at these newly coeducational institutions focused on cultural subjects that were “seen as preparation for teaching or for family and community roles” (Chamberlain, 1988, p. 9). Women were allowed to exist in the same institutions as men, yet they did not have equal access to participate in the same variety of courses as their male classmates. In this way, the education that female students received was still controlled by the institution and society around them.

After the early 1900s, the number of women pursuing higher education in the United States began to increase. By the 1930s, the proportion of women who earned a bachelor’s degree jumped from 9% to 40% (Chamberlain, 1988). However, though women started to have more of a presence in higher education, the content women studied and the lack of support to explore new subjects did not change (Chamberlain, 1988). Even if women were able to take courses in other subjects beyond the liberal arts, the only professional option for women was teaching (Sicherman, 1988). While society became comfortable with women attending college and earning degrees, this comfort was founded in the seemingly steadfast idea that women were learning what was appropriate for the time: how to be a good homemaker, wife, and mother, or how to be a good teacher.

## **A Change in the Course Selection**

### **Encouragement on the National Level**

The United States’ participation in WWII introduced many societal changes; however, as men were increasingly sent abroad to take part in the war efforts, college campuses specifically saw a change in demographics as the enrollment of male students sharply declined (Chamberlain, 1988). Since more individuals were needed to help with stateside wartime efforts than were available from the male population, there was an increase in demand for women to start work as junior draftsmen, chemists, physicists and mathematicians, accountants, statisticians, economists, typists, pre-training in the air force, and especially as nurses (Kandel, 1948). In order to be prepared for these new demands, women had to be educated and trained in these areas. In this way, women were called to serve their country through an educational route.

With the influx of female students on campuses and the need for women to take on these new roles, university and federal officials encouraged women to modify and adapt their academic studies toward the

science and math fields to accommodate the war efforts and to gain war-related employment (Dorn, 2008). For example, the Bureau of Vocations for the University of California, Berkeley “urged female students to take the coursework necessary to qualify for employment in fields such as accounting and chemistry” (Dorn, 2008, p. 543). The U.S. Office of War Information’s Bureau of Motion Pictures released films that highlighted the contributions that female college students were making to the national defense program by highlighting female students enrolled in mechanical design courses, which provided them with the technical knowledge to work as war-related radio technicians and in aviation plants (Dorn, 2008). Additionally, the U.S. Office of Education Wartime Commission decided that a modification in school programs needed to change the curriculum so that “wartime specific courses such as mechanized warfare courses, courses in industrial arts related to war needs, courses in auto mechanics, practical courses in home economics” and other relevant selections could be taught (Kandel, 1948, pp. 35-36). As the demand for women to work began to progressively increase, and as female students sought out ways to aid in the war efforts, female college student participation in this new curriculum was encouraged, if not enforced (Kandel, 1948). Through these wartime efforts, women were encouraged by both federal agencies and college campuses across the country to enroll in the STEM courses that had not previously been available to them.

Female organizations also rallied behind the government and media to encourage this call to duty through education. In a 1942 report, the Committee of College Women Students and the War (CCWSW) urged women to study the sciences, mathematics, and social sciences, emphasizing that these subjects are “vitaly important for the effective participation of college women in the war program” (Kandel, 1948, p. 168-169). These areas of study were prioritized so women were prepared for employment as soon as possible. Further, in the summer of 1943, the Journal of the AAUW ran an article stating that women had “an obligation to find and undertake the tasks which call for those qualities our education should have given us” (American Association of University Women, 1943, p. 209). With the sense of urgency that the government and other national groups put on women to participate in the war efforts via job trainings and courses, colleges and universities had to follow through and provide female students the appropriate courses to prepare them for these positions.

### **The Change in Course Availability**

In response to the national movement to focus the higher education

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curriculum on wartime efforts, colleges and universities offered academic coursework that corresponded to this new approach. By way of providing guidance, the CCWSW issued “A Statement of Policy for Colleges of Arts and Sciences” that advised colleges and universities to change their curriculum to “provide the necessary foundations for professional training in the most urgently needed professions” (Kandel, 1948, p. 169). This statement suggested that the curriculum be modified to combine the STEM disciplines with the liberal arts and sciences curricula (Kandel, 1948). With this wartime modification in mind, colleges and universities opened courses to female students that had not been available to them before. Schools like the University of Pittsburgh moved forward with training women in medicine, dentistry, math, and engineering (Dorn, 2008). The State College of Washington re-evaluated their curricula as well and began training women in technical services as part of the war effort (Hosp, 1943). Other institutions, such as Barnard College and Smith College, offered female students the opportunity to take meteorology, electronic, and other STEM related courses for the first time (Dorn, 2008).

The period during WWII saw an increase in the amount of female students taking advantage of the opportunities presented and participating in the STEM disciplines; the more courses and trainings became available, the more women enrolled. For example, in 1943 Smith College reported an overall increase in female students enrolling in STEM courses: a 33% increase of female students in mathematics courses, a 68% increase in chemistry, a 38% increase in physics, and a 70% increase in statistics (Dorn, 2008). Similarly, women at the University of California, Berkeley (UC Berkeley) also began enrolling in the UC Berkeley engineering program, doubled their presence in the premedical program, and enrolled in the College of Chemistry at four times the prewar rate (Dorn, 2008). Not only were female students enrolling in and being admitted to these courses, but also they were meeting the demands of these courses with success. During WWII, UC Berkeley saw the amount of female students who earned bachelor’s degrees in chemistry increase four times the prewar rate, and double in the amount of female students who earned a bachelor’s degree in math (Dorn, 2008). Based on the fact that women were now earning undergraduate degrees in science and math, it was evident that female students were excited to study and find support in the STEM disciplines.

### **Women in STEM after World War II**

The end of WWII brought yet another change to higher education. As a part of the postwar recovery plan, the G.I. Bill was introduced, which guaranteed military personnel one year of paid education, or tuition, for

every 90 days of service (Thelin, 2004). This plan provided veterans the opportunity to attend a college or university without the worry of cost (Kim & Rury, 2007). The G.I. Bill resulted in an increase in the amount of male veterans on college campuses across the country. This meant that women who had been active students during WWII found that priority in admission was given to the returning veterans, thereby displacing non-veteran female students (Chamberlain, 1988; Eisenmann, 2006). Consequently, in 1944, the first year that the G.I. Bill benefits became available, the nation saw a steep increase in the amount of men in higher education and a considerable drop in the amount of female students by comparison (Eisenmann, 2006). At the height of the war, for example, women made up to 49.8% of all students on campuses; however, by 1948, this statistic dropped to 28.8% (Eisenmann, 2006). Due to the G.I. Bill and the end of the war, the demographic landscape on college and university campuses were once again shifting.

Along with the number of female students on campus decreasing, so did the support women received to study the STEM subjects. Female students were now encouraged to return to studying the liberal arts and humanities so they could round out their wartime education with more traditional subjects. This movement is seen in a post-war article in the *Journal of the AAUW*, stating that “since many will already be thoroughly trained in some practical field such as nursing, dietetics, statistics, chemistry, physics, or engineering this type of ‘rounding out’ at a liberal arts institution” is necessary (Hosp, 1944, p. 159). It was suggested that women who sought professional employment return to their traditional, pre-WWII roles rather than continue on with the skills and education gained as part of the war effort (Hosp, 1944). Therefore opportunities for training as junior and senior high school teachers in the traditional areas such as home economics, art, music, and physical and general education were offered and encouraged (Hosp, 1944). In these ways, the end of WWII and the reintroduction of men brought a retreat to the pre-war approach to female education.

However, even with this return to pre-war female education, women continued to remain interested in both attending college and the STEM disciplines. The difference was that women were not outwardly united in their approach to participate in non-traditional roles within higher education. The opportunities that were created for women during WWII were not lost, but simply seemed to go through a type of restructuring during the postwar era. After WWII, women faced challenges when dealing with the expectations surrounding what was considered their appropriate role and contribution to this postwar society (Eisenmann, 2006). As women



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worked to reconcile with this identity, the proportion of women enrolled in higher education decreased. Regardless of this uncertain period in female education history, however, the advances women made in education during WWII seemed to impact future opportunities in higher education and in the STEM disciplines. While influenced by society and the pressure for women to return to their traditional roles as mothers, wives, and teachers, women continued to enroll in higher education institutions in increasing numbers even following the end of World War II (Dorn, 2008).

Nearly 70 years later, women's presence in the STEM fields is still not as prevalent as it was during WWII, with men continuing to earn a higher proportion of science and engineering degrees (National Science Foundation, 2013). Yet the amount of women pursuing degrees in the STEM disciplines continues to grow. According to the National Science Foundation (NSF) report, *Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities in Science and Engineering: 2013* there has been an increase in the amount of women who earn bachelor's degrees in engineering, computer sciences, and the social sciences and biosciences in the last five years. Additionally, prestigious American universities have acknowledged that there are institutional barriers that are blocking female success in the STEM fields (Rosser, 2003). These barriers include the assumption and presentation that the STEM fields are more masculine disciplines, the patterns of inclusion or exclusion in research based on gender, and the tendency to "weed-out" students from the classroom that are blocking female students from succeeding in these areas of study (Fox, Sonnert, & Nikiforova, 2009). With this acknowledgement, however, women's presence in these areas of study is increasing, and will hopefully continue to do so as colleges and universities begin to work with their female counterparts.

### **Implications for Higher Education**

Studies have shown that female students tend to have a "lower level of self-confidence in mathematics and a lower internal sense of ability or potential for scientific achievement" which also serve as barriers to success in these subjects (Fox, Sonnert, & Nikiforova, 2009, p. 335). During the postwar years, the support and encouragement women received to participate in the STEM disciplines decreased dramatically. Because women no longer received academic encouragement and support after the war and were expected to return to the traditional gender roles, women lost the confidence they had to continue pursuing these subjects. The lack of confidence combined with the lack of support has contributed and resulted in fewer female students studying the STEM subjects today. Therefore,

it is important for higher education professionals to understand and acknowledge the more oppressive history of female students in order to help empower interested female students to pursue the STEM fields. By knowing this history and working to nurture these interests, faculty and administrators can make female students feel more welcome and supported in STEM classrooms.

A way to increase support and therefore confidence is to make women more aware of the educational and professional opportunities available in the STEM fields. A program already in practice that helps remedy this is called ADVANCE started in 2001 by the NSF. Programs like ADVANCE work with colleges and universities to create “systematic approaches to increase the representation and advancement of women in STEM careers,” therefore ensuring that women who earn degrees in the STEM subjects stay in the field (National Science Foundation, 2011; Rosser, 2003, p. 1). The NSF then awards grant money to the institution that creates the strongest initiative to support and retain professional women in the STEM disciplines (National Science Foundation, 2011). Colleges and universities should mimic ADVANCE by creating STEM related programs that attract and support female undergraduate students through graduation and beyond. As an incentive for the college or university, an award in the form of a grant or research funding would be offered if the program seemed feasible and successful. Since this idea takes a similar approach as the NSF ADVANCE program, both programs can work together to attract female students to study the STEM subjects in a supportive environment, while also confirming that a career in the STEM fields is a distinct possibility.

The possibility of a female undergraduate student oriented STEM program would call for professors and instructors who are supportive and encouraging of women in the field. It has also been found that the most successful STEM programs for women offer special support and programmatic activities such as extra study groups specifically for women (Fox, Sonnert, & Nikiforova, 2009). The implementation of all female study groups, or female-to-female mentorships within the STEM disciplines would help to increase the presence of women studying these subjects. By giving female students this additional support, they might feel more encouraged to pursue these majors and career paths. In this way, both recommendations can work together to create a supportive learning environment for female students in the STEM fields.

#### Limitations

Limitations for this article include the use of a timeline that mainly discusses white, Protestant, relatively affluent female students

during specific times in United States history. Future research should consider all demographics of women from diverse cultural, ethnic, and socioeconomic backgrounds. Additionally, the research for this article is not exhaustive, but is intended to give the reader a sense of the journey that women's education in the STEM disciplines has gone through. It is also important to include that there are many STEM-related higher education programs currently working to encourage more female student participation. The recommendations provided here are general and are meant to inspire future research and advocacy for women in the STEM fields.

### **Conclusion**

The time female students spent between 1941 and 1945 participating in STEM courses and trainings opened doors for future women to study these subjects. However, what started as a strong presence in the STEM subjects during WWII dwindled during the post-war years, and yet women's interest in the STEM fields persisted. As educators and practitioners, it is important to learn from the history of women in higher education and make sure that every educational opportunity is available to them, including opportunities in the STEM fields. By acknowledging the institutional and individual barriers women face in these areas, including exclusion based on gender, the "weeding out" process in classrooms, and also the confidence issues female students face, we can break down these barriers and offer the support and encouragement necessary to help them succeed. If we, as higher education practitioners, own this responsibility, and create programming that effectively creates change, the female student presence in science, technology, engineering, and mathematics can continue to grow.

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# Former Foster Care Youth in Higher Education

**Liz Reinhardt**

Former foster care youth comprise an extremely at-risk and vulnerable population on college campuses. Lack of awareness about this population's presence and particular needs can further hinder these students' chances for educational success. Former foster care youth (FFY) are defined as "youths or young adults who were previously in the legal guardianship or custody of a state, county, or private adoption or foster care agency" at some point during their lives (Casey Family Programs, 2011, p. 35). While youth may enter foster care for a variety of reasons, most of these youth enter the foster care system due to child maltreatment (Barbell & Freundlich, 2001). An estimated 408,425 children were in foster care on September 30, 2010 in the United States (Child Welfare Information Gateway, 2012, p. 3), and nearly 28,000 children "aged out" of the foster care system and became independent in 2010 (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2011, p. 4). When examining FFY who spent at least one year in foster care after age 13, an estimated 150,000 are between the ages of 18 and 25 and are college-qualified (i.e., have graduated from high school). However, only about 30,000 of these college-qualified youth attend college (Wolanin, 2005, p. 7).

Although FFY face similar struggles to other low-income, first-generation students, they also face additional barriers due to their lack of traditional support systems and sometimes traumatic personal histories. Consequently, FFY access higher education at much lower rates than non-foster care students, and those youth who do transition to college face extraordinary barriers in areas such as: finances, mental health, academics, and housing. This paper reviews the literature on FFY in higher education by first detailing the population's unique obstacles and then examining the governmental policies and educational programs aimed to improve access and degree attainment. By educating the higher education community about this vulnerable population and sharing information about progressive programs, this paper serves to draw attention to this often invisible population and to encourage higher education institutions to provide greater support to FFY in their own colleges and universities.

## **Educational Attainment Rates**

Research has consistently shown that FFY have low rates of educational attainment compared to the general population. In a review of multiple research studies on the subject, Wolanin (2005) reported that only 50% of foster care youth complete high school compared to 70% of

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their peers (p. 7). In regards to postsecondary education, Pecora et al. (2005) found that 21.9% of a sample of FFY ages 25-33 had completed a vocational degree and only 2.7% of the sample population in this age bracket had completed a bachelor's degree (p. 36). While other studies have found that FFY have drastically different completion rates (2.5%-11.8% for bachelor degree completion among FFY ages 25-26), these completion rates are still consistently lower than those of their non-foster care peers (Courtney, Dworsky, Brown, Cary, Love, & Vorhies, 2011, p. 20; Havalchak, White, & O'Brien, 2008, p. 6). Furthermore, FFY have lower attainment rates compared to other at-risk students in higher education. In a comparison between FFY students and their low-income, first-generation, non-foster care peers at a four-year university, Day, Dworsky, Fogarty, and Darnashek (2011) found that FFY students were significantly more likely to drop out of school both prior to degree completion and before the end of their first year.

These low rates of educational attainment do not appear to be the result of a lack of desire on the part of foster youth; one study by McMillen, Auslander, Elze, White, and Thompson (2003) found that 70% of surveyed foster youth between the ages 15 and 19 want to attend college (p. 483). Rather, the low rates of educational attainment are often connected to the various obstacles FFY face in their pursuit of higher education. FFY face serious barriers that include the inability to pay, inadequate academic preparation for college-level work, the absence of postsecondary information, and lack of support systems.

### **Barriers to Success**

Among the most prominent barriers to postsecondary education for FFY is the cost of college, according to a study by Courtney et al. (2011). Hernandez and Naccarato (2010) found similar findings in their interviews with program coordinators of college scholarship and support programs for FFY. When FFY do enter higher education, these youth generally encounter "the same educational costs as their non-foster-care counterparts," but have "dramatically lower incomes and [are] more likely to be financially independent" (Davis, 2006, p. 20).

### **Academic Barriers**

Inadequate academic preparation for college marks another significant barrier to higher education. The academic struggles foster care youth face in their primary and secondary school years are complicated and multi-faceted. First, foster youth are often concentrated in low-performing schools (Smithgall, Gladden, Howard, Goerge, & Courtney, 2004). Also, studies have shown that foster care youth have higher

rates of special education classifications (Burley & Halpern, 2001) and learning disabilities (Smithgall et al., 2004), and they are more likely to repeat a grade in school than non-foster care youth (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Smithgall et al., 2004). Moreover, children in foster care have lower test scores (Burley & Halpern, 2001) and higher rates of suspensions and expulsions than their non-foster care peers (Courtney, Terao, & Bost, 2004). These trends of low academic performance are correlated with histories of abuse or neglect (Smithgall et al., 2004), feelings of anxiety and worry regarding their biological families and unstable futures (Finkelstein, Warnsley, & Miranda, 2002), and the high rates of school changes foster youth experience due to changes in home placements (Burley & Halpern, 2001; Smithgall et al., 2004). Furthermore, problems of poor communication between foster families, caseworkers, and school personnel can negatively affect the child's academic progress (Finkelstein, Warnsley, & Miranda, 2002; Smithgall et al., 2004). These related factors often intertwine, resulting in a trouble-ridden academic experience for foster youth.

The academic struggles FFY face in their primary and secondary school years result in ill-preparation for postsecondary entry and success. Additionally, foster youth lack the information on how to access and afford college (Weston & Cheng, 2007). Consequently, not only are FFY often ill-prepared for college-level work, but many of them also lack the necessary information to find their way to college.

### **Lack of Support Systems**

In addition to the inability to pay for college and poor academic preparation, FFY face other obstacles related to mental health and emotional support. Foster youth tend to suffer from high instances of mental health disorders, particularly post-traumatic stress disorder (Courtney et al., 2011; Havalchak et al. 2008; Pecora et al. 2005), depression (Courtney et al., 2011; Havalchak et al. 2008; Pecora et al. 2005), and social phobia (Courtney et al., 2011; Pecora et al. 2005). FFY also “generally lack sustained relationships with caring adults...that would enable them to undertake the adult responsibilities that are inherent in higher education” (Wolanin, 2005, p. 13). This lack of support may mean that when obstacles arise in their pursuit of education, these youth have few people they can turn to for assistance or guidance.

FFY also often struggle in their transition to adulthood simply because they become independent at an early age. According to a study by Courtney, Dworsky, Lee, and Raap (2010), among a sample of foster care youth exiting care, “nearly one-third reported that they felt not very



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or not at all prepared” to be self-sufficient when they exited foster care (p. 21). While Pecora et al. (2005) found that 56.9% of FFY reported they were somewhat prepared or very prepared for independent living (p. 29), these youth also reported possessing few resources when leaving care. Only 33.3% reported they had a driver’s license when they left care, 38.4% had at least \$250 in cash, and 23.7% had dishes and utensils (Pecora et al., 2005, p. 29). Furthermore, foster care youth may age out of the system without learning basic living skills, such as opening a bank account, shopping for groceries, or navigating public transportation (Wolanin, 2005). In focus groups conducted with FFY attending high school and college, these students reported that life skills training would be helpful in their transition to college (Weston & Cheng, 2007); without learning these basic skills, foster youth can have a difficult time living independently.

Finally, homelessness is a critical issue among youth leaving foster care (Courtney et al. 2011; Havalchak et al, 2008; Pecora et al., 2005). Without a permanent family home, foster youth often must try to arrange their own housing, and most youth “have no family to assist with their rent, co-sign a lease or explain the details of a rental agreement” (Casey Family Programs, 2010, p. 29). Foster youth entering college may encounter housing gaps between the time of their emancipation and the beginning of the school semester. Furthermore, students who live on-campus must often contend with institutional rules prohibiting them from living in campus facilities over school breaks and summers.

### **Strategies for Progress**

Although statistics are bleak for the educational prospects of foster care youth, educational institutions and government policies are striving for improvement. The following sections will describe examples of federal and state policies, summer bridge programs, and campus support programs aiming to improve the educational attainment of FFY.

#### **Federal and State Policy to Improve Access and Retention**

In recent years, federal and state governments have passed legislation to ease the transition to postsecondary education and adulthood for foster care youth. While youth have traditionally been emancipated from foster care at age 18, several states have extended the age to 21; therefore, youth may continue to access services through their early college careers (Casey Family Programs, 2010). Furthermore, in 2008, Congress passed the Fostering Connections to Success and Increasing Adoptions Act which “includes federal matching payments for states

choosing to continue foster care assistance for older youth to the age of 21 if engaged in school, work, or other constructive activities” (Casey Family Programs, 2010, p. 7). While research on these policies has yielded some positive findings, it appears such policies have a limited effect on degree attainment. Extending foster care eligibility to age 21 appears to increase a foster care youth’s likelihood of completing at least one year of college. However, these youth are no more likely to graduate from college by age 23 or 24 than foster youth in states that did not extend the age (Dworsky, 2010).

In another example of federal policy, the 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act specifically calls attention to the needs of foster care youth. In the past, programs such as TRIO, Student Support Services, Educational Opportunity Centers, and GEAR UP have served at-risk student populations through outreach and support services, but they have not focused on the unique needs of foster care youth. The 2008 legislation calls for these programs to more effectively serve the foster care youth population and secure housing during school breaks and summers (American Bar Association, 2008).

### **Financial Aid Policy**

Considering the low-income status of many FFY, financial assistance is an absolute necessity for these students to succeed in college. Fortunately, foster care students are eligible for different types of aid. The 2008 reauthorization of the Higher Education Opportunity Act “expands the definition of independent student to include those who were in foster care or a ward of the court at any time at age 13 or older” (Casey Family Programs, 2010, p. 10), thus clarifying a student’s need for financial aid. In addition, the federally-funded, state-administered Chafee Education and Training Vouchers program funds up to \$5000 per year for FFY under the age of 23 who were in foster care at any point between the ages of 16 and 18 (Davis, 2006). States have also stepped up their contribution: “over 30 states now have policies that provide state-funded scholarships, grants, or tuition waivers to youth in foster care who are making the transition from foster care to higher education” (Casey Family Programs, 2010, p. 10).

It should be noted, however, that financial aid for these youth is not always disbursed accordingly. A California research study found that only one in 25 foster youth financial aid applicants in the state received all three major federal and state grants available to foster youth (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2009). Among a multitude of reasons, the study proposed that this lack of distribution was due to: a lack of

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awareness about financial aid among foster youth, the complicated nature of financial aid applications, the sometimes troublesome requirement of verifying foster care status, and the lateness of the aid arrival (Cochrane & Szabo-Kubitz, 2009).

### **Summer Bridge Programs**

Summer bridge programs have the potential to improve college access among foster youth, and the Advisory Board Company (2009) recommends such programs. Two examples of summer bridge programs include the Michigan Educational Opportunities for Youth in Care (a program serving FFY ages 15-19) and Washington State's Make It Happen! program (serving FFY in grades 10 and higher). Both programs take place on college campuses and offer workshops and presentations by FFY currently enrolled in college. Evaluation of the Michigan program found that participants reported learning most about "campus life" and "scholarships for college" during the camp (Kirk & Day, 2011, p. 1176). Campers also reported feeling motivated from the talks and examples set forth by the camp counselors and foster care alumni speakers (Kirk & Day, 2011). Similarly, preliminary evaluation of Washington State's program found an increased readiness to apply for college and an increased knowledge on how to afford college (Washington State Institute for Public Policy, 2008). Such programs have the potential to disseminate relevant, useful information about college to FFY, prepare FFY for college life, and motivate them to make the transition after high school.

### **Campus Support Programs**

The number of college campus support programs for FFY has grown in recent years, particularly in the state of California (National Working Group for Foster Care and Education, 2011). These programs are considered by many experts to be imperative in increasing FFY's success in college. Although research has not yet shown the impact of such programs on FFY retention and graduation, several studies have investigated these programs and their components. Integral elements of these support programs include professional academic and emotional support along with housing assistance.

To support FFY academically, tutoring services and a specialized academic advisor are two common components seen in campus support services (Advisory Board Company, 2009). With consideration to the inadequate academic preparation many FFY receive, some support programs offer academic counseling and disability services (Advisory Board Company, 2009; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). A designated

academic advisor who understands the background and challenges of foster care youth may also help youth as they navigate the educational system (Advisory Board Company, 2009; Weston & Cheng, 2007). Some campus programs offer mentoring services for foster youth that combine academic support with emotional support (Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010).

Both college support program coordinators and students receiving support services note that emotional support is an important component in FFY college support programs (Dworsky & Perez, 2009; Hernandez & Naccarato, 2010). In Dworsky and Perez's (2009) study, 86% of FFY involved in campus support programs indicated these programs provided them with a sense of family or community. Furthermore, more than three-quarters of those students who indicated a community atmosphere also regarded this sense of community as important or very important to their success in school (p. 33). Other studies indicate that social support potentially serves as a major contributor to the educational success of FFY in higher education (Hass & Graydon, 2009; Merdinger, Hines, Osterling, & Wyatt, 2005). It should be noted, however, that the youth in Hass and Graydon's (2009) study reported notably lower instances of involvement in special education, mental health services, and the criminal justice system than foster youth in other studies; hence, these youth may have had less obstacles in their postsecondary educational aspirations than other foster care youth.

Along with peer and mentor emotional support, close interaction with counseling services is imperative for FFY considering their high rates of mental health disorders. In order to assist students, "several campus support programs have negotiated a doubling of the number of [counseling] sessions for which students are eligible each year or arranged to have the cap lifted altogether" (Dworsky & Perez, 2009, p. 18). If on-campus services are not available, programs have the potential to partner with community organizations that provide such resources.

Another type of support necessary for FFY educational success is housing assistance. According to a Casey Family Programs (2010) report, housing is often the first and most crucial barrier to college success for this population. To rectify the problem, universities have offered FFY students year-round housing so they are not left without a home during school breaks and summers (Advisory Board Company, 2009; Dworsky & Perez, 2009). For community colleges or institutions with a shortage of housing, some campus support program directors have developed strategic solutions by working with local transitional housing programs, local housing authorities, and churches, and also partnering with other four-year universities that provide dormitory housing (Social Science Research

Center and the Ball State/Ivy Tech Guardian Scholars, 2007). Independent living providers are especially helpful as they may offer services such as life skills training that can be beneficial for foster youth (Casey Family Programs, 2010).

The services mentioned, while extremely important in campus support programs, do not comprise an exhaustive list. To address financial concerns of FFY, campus programs have previously utilized designated financial aid liaisons (Advisory Board Company, 2009) and scholarships (Advisory Board Company, 2009; Dworsky & Perez, 2009). Experts also recommend building ties with local social service organizations and addressing the meal and transportation needs of students (Casey Family Programs, 2010). Advocates of campus support programs often call for comprehensive, wrap-around services and collaboration with higher education administrators and community stakeholders in order to most effectively serve the needs of this population.

### **Conclusion**

While child welfare systems at the state level certainly ought to be improved to better prepare FFY for higher education, colleges and universities can also contribute to the college access and attainment rates of this population by considering the establishment of summer bridge programs and campus support programs. While not all institutions have the means to create new support services, existing TRIO programs and other support offices on campus can better serve this population by facilitating staff trainings on the unique issues faced by FFY. In particular, financial aid counselors should be informed of the federal and relevant state financial aid opportunities for FFY so that these students can more easily afford college. Furthermore, if colleges and universities have not yet considered housing exceptions for FFY and other homeless youth, then this step is crucial to ensure this population is well-supported. Fortunately for college campuses, different resources exist to help establish or improve such programs, including the Casey Family Programs' (2010) Program Planning and Improvement Guide and the Advisory Board Company's (2009) custom research brief. Finally, although many campuses have developed such support programs, little research has been conducted to evaluate their impact. Therefore, more research is needed to determine the effective components of these programs.

When taking into account the diverse student body of today's postsecondary institutions, it is difficult to justify tailoring student services and support policies for one population. However, foster care youth

comprise one of society's most vulnerable populations, and education may be considered to be this population's "lifeline" (National Working Group, 2011, July, p. 1). By making adjustments at the institutional level, colleges and universities have the potential to make a large impact on the futures of former foster youth.

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# Confessions of a “Love & Hip Hop” Junkie: A Critical Essay on Reality Television and Its Influence on the Dating Behavior of Black College Women

**Shawna Patterson**

On August 11, 2012, *Basketball Wives* stars Chad “Ochocinco” Johnson and Evelyn Lozada created a media firestorm when news broke that the two were involved in a domestic violence dispute (Little, 2012; Miami Herald, 2012). It was alleged that Johnson head-butted Lozada after she accused him of having an extramarital affair. Johnson and Lozada were recently married on July 4, 2012 and on September 19, 2012, their divorce was finalized (Little, 2012; Schapiro & Alcorn, 2012). Individuals unfamiliar with the backstory of this situation may question its significance. Domestic violence is a complicated matter, and it may appear that Johnson simply encountered the negative repercussions of his actions. However, this incident has far-reaching implications among populations of Black women throughout the United States (Boylorn, 2008; Mallory, 2011; Tamara, 2012). Black, traditional-aged high school and college women have become particularly vulnerable to the images projected by reality television shows, especially programming within the hip-hop genre (Henry, West, & Jackson, 2010). The Johnson and Lozada saga is just one of several accounts that signify how heterosexual relationships may function for young Black women.

Black college women attending predominantly White institutions (PWIs) are distinctively inundated with conflicting messages surrounding their educational achievement and how it will negatively affect their ability to enter into monogamous, heterosexual relationships with Black men (Henry, 2008). The widening stratification of college degree attainment between Black women and men, as well as the disproportionately high rates of Black male imprisonment has negatively impacted Black heterosexual relationships (Kitwana, 2002; Rose, 2008). These issues have become prevalent in dialogues shared among Black college women on topics surrounding dating and relationships, particularly at PWIs, where a lack of racial representation persists. Couple these narratives with identity markers and the iconography signaled by reality television, and it becomes evident why the behaviors displayed on-screen are mimicked by young Black women off-screen.

This critical essay explores the impact that hip-hop reality television shows can have on the dating behaviors of low-income Black college

women. In order to provide context, a brief introduction to the dialogue surrounding the programs will be discussed. Utilizing Black feminist thought and womanist identity development theory as a framework, this critique will capture the psychosocial parallels observed between Black undergraduate women and the women depicted in the Love & Hip Hop and Basketball Wives television series. The focus of this critique will center upon the ways in which a weak self-concept, low-socioeconomic status, and fragile family ties can lead Black college women to emulate the behaviors illustrated on hip-hop reality shows. This work concludes with the implications of these programs among Black women at the college level and recommendations for future research.

### **Hip-Hop Reality Television**

According to Kitwana (2002), the “commercialization of rap music expanded the definition of hip-hop culture beyond the four elements (graffiti, break dancing, dj-ing, rap music) to include verbal language, body language, attitude, style, and fashion...‘hood’ films and hip-hop magazines” (p. 8). Kitwana (2002) further explains that hip-hop culture is also reflective in the attitudes of professional athletes, public figures, and entertainers who personify anti-hegemonic dispositions and demonstrate a connection with the Black community. It is within this schema that the VH1 cable network expanded elements of hip-hop culture in its development of the series, Flavor of Love, and its subsequent development of hip-hop genre reality television. Though the show became notorious for its hypersexuality, negative depictions of women, unrealistic innuendo, and minstrel-like qualities, it was the first reality series to feature a predominantly Black cast. Highlighting the wives of a rap star, it also laid the groundwork for the most recent line-up of hip-hop reality now readily available on television.

Researchers posit that this commodification of hip-hop culture has opened the door for corporations to capitalize upon inequities that remain prevalent within the African American community (Asante, 2008; Kitwana, 2002; Rose, 1994 & 2008), a practice which has steadily gained ground since the airing of Flavor of Love. The self-deprecating mannerisms that were once displayed by a small group of women have since become a common occurrence on television. Following the trend of corporate commodification, shows such as Flavor of Love, Love and Hip Hop, and the Basketball Wives have misappropriated cultural influences prevalent in the hip hop community and have disseminated oversimplified depictions of Black love in the form of rap reality spin-offs (Diaz, 2012; Kitwana, 2002; IMDb, 2006; Russell, 2011). Each program is consistent

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in placing emphasis upon the physical appearance of women and depicting them as co-dependent individuals who willingly sustain relationships with non-monogamous men. The majority of the cast members are women of low socioeconomic status and the shows brandish garish displays of violence among Black women, sexual lewdness, and excessive use of expletives, which has intensified stereotypes about low-income Black women (Boylorn, 2008).

### **Black Feminist Thought & Womanist Identity Development**

Television is one of many sources of information that influence the masses through its use of popular culture, sociopolitical ideologies, and various forms of imagery (Emerson, 2002; Perkins, 1996; Stevens, 2002), and is especially influential among youth and adolescents still experiencing the process of cognitive growth and developmental maturation (Stevens, 2002). Contextually, the content of the messages promoted on television can be especially detrimental for Black youth and teenagers, who must navigate the typical developmental processes of adolescence in addition to the stages of racial socialization that most Black Americans undergo as a racial minority in a predominantly White society (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; Henry et al., 2010; Stevens, 2002). Nunnally (2012) states that “racial socialization is the process by which African Americans learn about and identify with the influence of race on their social status, culture, and group history in the United States” (p. 58), and it is most often facilitated by family members.

The intersections of race, class, gender, and sexual orientation create the locus of identity formation for the majority of Black women in the U.S. (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984; Stevens, 2002; Tate, 2003). These designations are socially constructed and are not biological; however, social identities are significant and are instrumental in constructing normative behavior (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001; hooks, 1981, 1984). Though a convergence exists between the socialization processes of race, class, gender, and sexuality, race is the most prominent social identity that Black women contend with during their personal development process (Nunnally, 2012).

Upon enrolling at a PWI, traditional-aged Black women undergo several identity-based experiences (Chickering, 1969; Henry, 2008). In addition to the formation of independent value and belief systems, Black women must also learn how their racial and gendered identities intersect, reconciling the dissonance that often occurs between Black women and traditionally White infrastructures (Chickering, 1969; Collins, 2000; Helms, 1990; Henry, 2008). Women of color advance through stages of

development, where they encounter and challenge societal depictions of Blackness. In accordance with womanist identity development theory, Black women must progress along a spectrum where they shift from utilizing external influences to internal capacities in defining themselves as women of color (Helms, 1990).

### **The Racial Development of Black Women: Contextual Dynamics**

Black adolescent women lacking healthy family ties and mentorship, and who are of low socioeconomic status are particularly susceptible to the messages communicated by hip-hop media, as they use it to identify role models and to provide them with a sense of authentic Blackness (Emerson, 2002; Henry et al., 2010; Kitwana, 2002; Judy, 2012; Rose, 1994). While the literature is lacking in empirical data, Wilma Henry has begun to conceptualize how the consumption of rap might be situated in the postsecondary experiences of Black undergraduate women. In their article on the implications of rap music on the dating practices of Black college women, Henry and colleagues (2010) concluded that the videos corresponding with the music were very instrumental in affecting the fashion trends, dating decisions, and self-perceptions of Black college women. Black undergraduate women who emulated the images promoted by rap media were also more likely to make sexually risqué decisions, as the students who attached themselves to video vixens found difficulty in formulating a positive conceptualization of self (Henry et al., 2010).

Nunnally (2012) states that the family is primarily responsible for nurturing the cognitive, emotional, and racial development of Black women. However, women who lack strong family ties are less likely to possess healthy perceptions of self and may struggle with self-esteem issues (Emerson, 2002; Nunnally, 2012; Stevens, 2002). Women who have not developed a strong self-concept and are low-income are also less likely to have access to vital human resources, including positive role models (Emerson, 2002; Erickson, McDonald, & Elder, 2009; Henry et al., 2010; Stevens, 2002). For Black undergraduate women who possess these characteristics, the culmination of these factors increases their susceptibility to the violence, conflict, and self-degradation perpetuated by hip-hop reality television (Emerson, 2002; Judy, 2012; Kitwana, 2002; Perkins, 1996; Rose, 1994; Schooler, Ward, Merriwether, & Caruthers, 2004; Stevens, 2002).

The consumption of hip-hop media in its commercialized form has led to the eventual internalization of patriarchal and anti-Black assumptions within the Black community (Asante, 2008; Emerson, 2002; Judy, 2012; Perkins, 1996; Rose, 1994 & 2008). In addition to distorted

misrepresentations of beauty, Black women who are highly involved in mainstream hip-hop culture are more likely to encounter portrayals of sexual exploitation, lyrics and statements degrading Black women, and violence against women (Asante, 2008; Mallory, 2012; Rose 2008; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Thus, the frequent practice of hip-hop reality television consumption, whose underpinnings aptly reflect the corporatized creations of hip-hop culture, can be detrimental to the intimate relationships of Black college women (Henry et al., 2010; Mallory, 2012; Perkins, 1996; Schooler et al., 2004).

### **Implications of Hip-Hop Reality Consumption Among Black College Women**

Educators on college campuses are beginning to draw parallels between hip-hop media and their students at considerable rates (Henry et al., 2010). Faculty and staff have noted that the emulation of language, style of dress, and representations of sex in rap music and videos have impacted the dating behaviors of Black college women. For instance, Henry, West, and Jackson (2010) introduced the concept of “lionization” within Black relationships, where several women engage in open sexual affairs with a single man. Rap lyrics, videos – and now hip-hop reality programming – are saturated with themes of lionization. The disproportionate male-to-female ratio among Black undergraduates – a ratio that is often observed on hip-hop reality television – supports the lionization canon that Henry, West, and Jackson (2010) described. On predominantly White campuses where Black undergraduate women lack Black role models, the perception that shared partnerships is a normative behavior in the Black community has been exacerbated. For low-income Black undergraduates who enter the academy with a weak self-concept and poor family ties, the continuation of reality television consumption into their postsecondary years can therefore leave them vulnerable to engaging in sexual intercourse before they are ready (Erickson et al., 2009; Forman, 2003; Henry et al., 2010; Kalichman, Williams, Cherry, Belcher, & Nachimson, 1998).

Several cast members of the Love & Hip Hop series struggled to resolve their feelings about their partners’ behavior. These men failed to hide their indiscretions and the women are repeatedly depicted in scenes where they are visibly upset by their partner’s choices, yet remained in static relationships. Unfortunately, this storyline has become increasingly re-enacted on college campuses and educators have observed the gradual acceptance of these behaviors among Black college women (Foreman, 2003; Henry, 2008; Henry et al., 2010). Because of the perception that it is challenging to identify suitable mates among Black males, Black



women seeking monogamous partnerships acquiesce to relationship conditions presented by prospective partners in their attempts to attain a mate (Foreman, 2003; Henry, 2008; Henry et al., 2010; Hernandez, McDaniel, Gyant, & Fletcher, 2012; Kalichman et al., 1998; Sharpley-Whiting, 2007). Conditions may include sexual favors, unprotected sexual intercourse, and maintaining an open relationship, where the male continues to copulate with multiple partners (Forman, 2003; Henry et al., 2010; Hernandez et al., 2012; Kalichman et al., 1998; Martino et al., 2006). These conditions may appear to represent normative behavior for low-income Black college women who have internalized similar relationship themes that are often disseminated through hip-hop reality programming.

Black undergraduate women who become involved in unstable sexual partnerships can become emotionally and cognitively distracted (Forman, 2003; Frisco, 2008; Kalichman et al., 1998; McCarthy & Grodsky, 2011). This may result in decreasing matriculation rates due to unplanned pregnancies, decreased participation in the campus community, poor academic performance, and a failure to identify positive role models (Erickson et al., 2009; Forman, 2003; Frisco, 2008; McCarthy & Grodsky, 2011). These factors are salient, as failure to complete a postsecondary degree further stratifies an already marginalized population.

### **Theory to Practice**

A great deal of complexity lies in developments surrounding hip-hop reality television, the self-conceptualization of Black undergraduate women, and dating. The issues resulting from the relationship between these components are problematic; however, colleges and universities can offer a variety of student services that are instrumental in curtailing the negative effects associated in the internalization of adverse imagery. Faculty and staff should therefore become more informed about the dating culture of Black college women in order to supply students with appropriate resource referrals.

In identifying the effects of hip-hop reality consumption among low-income Black undergraduate women, faculty and staff must be prepared to address indicators of psychological distraction or duress to ensure that students are not withdrawing from college prematurely. Also, administrators should introduce students to the options available within campus counseling and psychiatric services in efforts to provide them with an additional support network. Partnering with counseling services will make these amenities more readily available to students and will work to remove some of the negative associations surrounding psychiatric

services. Initiatives centered upon addressing issues of self-esteem, racial development, intimate relationships, and skill building would effectually work towards countering the negative implications associated with hip-hop reality consumption.

Faculty and staff are also encouraged to build interdisciplinary networks throughout the campus community to capitalize upon the resources available within the institution. Strong relationships among colleagues will increase the resources available to educators assisting students in attaining collegiate-level role models. The ideal role model would be familiar with the confluence of individual contextual dynamics, reality television consumption, and dating, and could mentor Black women through the exploration of intimate relationships and identity development.

Moreover, educators should be prepared to assist Black undergraduate women in learning how to identify and name instances of oppression in entertainment and in their lived experiences. Providing them with the tools necessary to make observations through a critical lens could assist in decreasing their susceptibility to the negative messages that are pervasive in hip-hop reality television. Faculty and staff must also encourage Black college women to reflect upon the experiences that have shaped their value systems. Providing students with the opportunity to connect these reflections with their postsecondary experience will support their process of independent values clarification and identity exploration.

### **Conclusion**

There is much work to be done in the analysis of hip-hop reality television consumption and its implications among Black college women. Data-driven examinations on the impact of hip-hop reality on Black undergraduate dating behaviors would specifically pinpoint the significance of contextual indicators among Black college women. In-depth investigation on the relationship between hip-hop reality consumption and students' willingness to remain in relationships exhibiting signs of domestic violence may reveal a particularly substantial facet of dating among Black undergraduates. Finally, an exploration on institutional differentiation could also assist scholars in determining if environmental factors at the postsecondary level contribute to patterns of consumption and internalization.

Black college women reconciling their racial and gendered identities must develop the cognitive ability to depend upon internal capacities to define themselves as racial and gendered minorities. However, it has become increasingly evident that low-income Black women who have

been unable to establish a strong self-concept are more likely to depend upon external influences to define themselves. Black undergraduate women of low socioeconomic status are particularly prone to emulating the cast members prevalent in hip-hop reality television because these characters have gained mainstream popularity and share demographic similarities. These factors increase the likelihood that low-income Black college women will find cast members relatable, making the themes prevalent in hip-hop reality increasingly influential in how students view themselves. Self-concept influences how Black undergraduate women engage in romantic relationships and select role models. Understanding how these interactions impact the psychological development and academic success of low-income Black college women will assist educators in initiating student services and policies that empathetically attend to the needs of these students.

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# GUIDELINES FOR AUTHORS

The *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University* publishes articles related to student development, professional development, administrative concerns, and groundbreaking initiatives to improve student services. Manuscripts should focus on original research; replication of research; reviews of research/literature; essays on theoretical, organizational, or professional issues; reviews of current literature relevant to the field; or practical reports of experiences from the field. All the original research articles that use human subjects must be approved by the NYU Institutional Review Board ([www.nyu.edu/ucaihs](http://www.nyu.edu/ucaihs)) prior to submission.

## Abstract Submission Guidelines

Abstracts must be submitted to the Content Editor and should be no longer than 250 words. Authors should provide the editorial team with an overview of the proposed article that demonstrates interest level in the proposed topic and the article's relevance to higher education and student affairs. The following information must be included with the abstract: name, title, address, e-mail address, year of graduation from NYU's Higher Education and Student Affairs program (if applicable). Authors of selected abstracts will be requested to submit a first draft in order to be considered for publication.

## Style Guidelines

Manuscripts must be clear, concise, relevant to the field, and demonstrate a well-organized development of ideas. The *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition* should be followed for reference style and general guidelines.

- Double-space all material, including references, quotations, tables, and figures. Leave extra space above and below subheadings, and include generous margins (at least one inch).
- Because manuscripts are processed through an anonymous review system, they should contain no indication of the author's identity or institutional affiliation (with the exception of a separate title page as outlined in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*). Where appropriate, institutional identification will be inserted after acceptance of a manuscript.
- Research manuscripts, reviews of the literature, and essays on professional issues should total no more than 12 double-spaced, typewritten pages (approximately 2,500 words), including references, figures, and tables. Shorter articles are accepted and encouraged.
- Original research (literary, qualitative, or quantitative) is encouraged.



All such work should be applicable to the higher education and student affairs professions.

- Field reports should not exceed three pages (approximately 600 words in length). They should briefly report on or describe new practices, programs, or techniques.
- Dialogues and interviews should follow the manuscript guidelines outlined in the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*. They should take the form of verbatim exchange, oral or written, between two or more people.
- Book reviews should not exceed five pages in length (approximately 1,000 words). Proposed title to be reviewed should be approved by the Executive Board. Authors are fully responsible for obtaining such texts. Additionally, it is the author's responsibility to secure permission to quote or adapt text content. The publisher's original written permission must be provided to the Executive Board before any manuscript can be published.
- Authors are responsible for the accuracy of all references, quotations, tables, and figures. Authors should make every effort to ensure that such items are complete and correct.

#### Submission Instructions

- Form and text content of manuscripts should comply with the above style guidelines and the general guidelines of the *Publication Manual of the American Psychological Association, Sixth Edition*. Manuscripts that do not conform to these guidelines cannot be considered.
- Manuscripts that have been previously published or are being considered for publication elsewhere should not be submitted. Authors will be asked to affirm non-duplication of submission before their manuscripts will be reviewed.
- Each submission should be submitted electronically in MS Word document format.
- It is imperative for all authors to adhere to all dates outlined in the Timeline. Failure to do so could result in omission from the Journal.
- The Executive Board will be responsible for all publication and editorial decisions.

Submissions and other inquiries should be directed to the Executive Board of the *Journal of Student Affairs at New York University*. Please visit us online at <http://steinhardt.nyu.edu/josa> for updates regarding contact information for the current Executive Board and submission dates for future editions of the Journal.

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