The Long Purple Line: Transition to Undergraduate Co-Education

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A brief history of coeducation

- Schooling at home
- "town schools"
  - Boys and girls were still educated separately
- By 1860 "common schools"
  - tax supported education pushed children into one coeducational classroom
- colleges and universities were single-sex
  - 59% were for men
- early adopter of coeducation - Oberlin College (1833)

A brief history of women's colleges

- Private secondary schools (seminaries)
  - conservative agenda, to protect women until marriage
- Liberal arts education comparable to that of men
  - empowerment, equality
- By 1930
  - most high schools and colleges were coeducational
  - there were approximately as many single-sex schools for both men and women (Riordan, 1994, p. 487)

The Chatham Story

- Pennsylvania Female College opened in 1869
- In 1955, became Chatham College for Women
  - motto "World Ready Woman"
- Declining in admissions for single-sex colleges since 1960
- Chatham considered coeducation twice
  - between 1989 and 1991
    - added graduate and online programs for men and women
  - Spring 2015
    - Decision made to move to undergraduate coeducation
    - Fully implemented in Fall 2015

This presentation

- Results of a focus group study of students and alumni
  - Britney Brinkman, Deanna Hamilton, Mary Jo Loughran
- A personal story from a current Chatham student
  - Kelly Nestman
- Results of an anonymous survey with some qualitative results
  - Jennifer Morse, Deondra Benson, Emma Hahn, Anthony Isacco, Kelly Nestman, Wonjin Sim, Avery Walker

Benefits and Drawbacks of a Women's College Education

Mary Jo Loughran, *Chatham University*; Deanna Hamilton, *Chatham University*; Britney Brinkman, *Chatham University*; Wonjin Sim, *Chatham University*

Methodology

- Focus groups with the following:
  - Alumnae (graduation range: Class of 1960 to 2001)
    - Volunteers attending reunion weekend
  - Current Seniors
    - Recruited via intranet announcement and word-of-mouth
- Focus Group Details:
  - Each comprised of 6 – 8 participants
  - Met for approximately 1.5 – 2 hours
  - Semi-structured, open-ended questions were posed to each focus group (with modifications based on generational differences)
  - Interviews audiotaped and transcribed verbatim
- Qualitative Analysis
  - Grounded Theory

Focus Group Questions

1. **If you think back to when you were making your decision about what college to attend, did you specifically look for a women-only college? Why or why not?**
2. **How did your expectations about attending a women's college match up to your experience once you got here?**
3. **Are there ways in which attending a women's college was a negative experience for you?**
4. **In what ways did attending a women-only college benefit you?**
5. **How did attending a women's college influence your self-confidence?**
6. **How did being at a women's college influence your career/post graduate plans?**
7. **How did being at a women's college influence your worldview?**
8. **How did being at a women's college influence your experience with relationships?**

Alumnae vs. Current Seniors

Originally wanted to attend a coed school

Discussion of "strong sisterhood"

Actively sought a women-only college

"Cliquey"

No Negatives

Identity Development

Self-Confidence

Female Connectedness

Alumnae

Seniors

Encouragement

Focus on Education (not appearance)

Female Mentors/Role Models
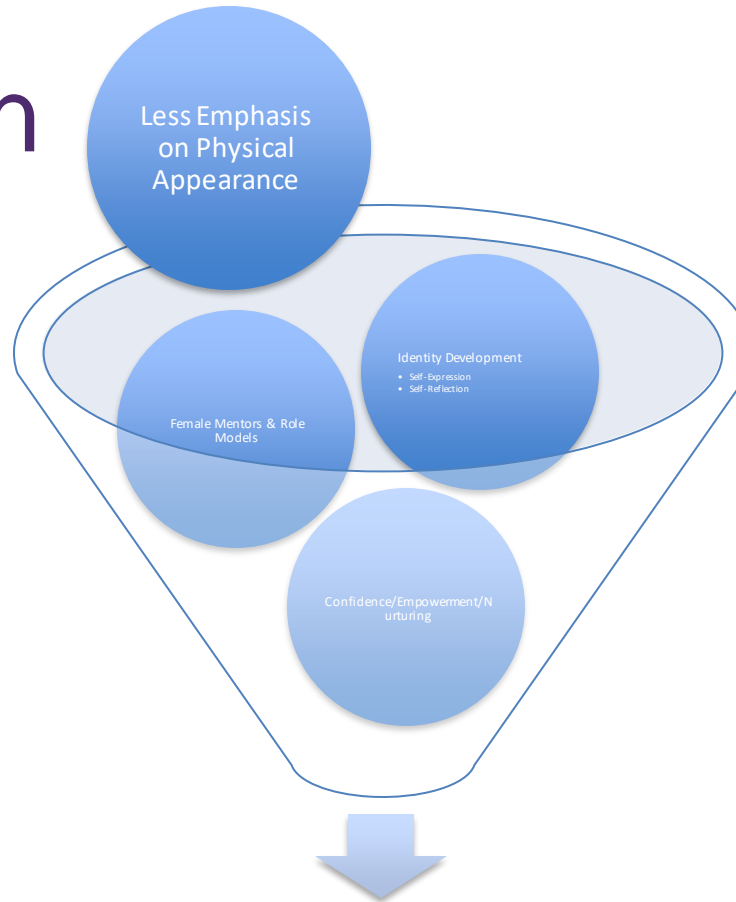
Broadened Worldview

Limited/Contrived male interactions

Leadership Confidence

Less emphasis on relationships or interactions with men

Lack of leadership/courage discussions

Discussion

Less Emphasis on Physical Appearance

Identity Development
- Self-Expression
- Self-Reflection

Female Mentors & Role Models

Confidence/Empowerment/Nurturing

Cross-Generational Benefits of Attending a Women's College

Methodological Limitations

- Alumnae Issues
  - Self-selection – participants recruited from reunion events
  - Self-Monitoring
  - Friends and Strangers
  - Nostalgia
- Senior Issues
  - End of semester demands (feelings about university and participant recruiting)
  - Location
  - Familiarity

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I am the "Failed Chatham"

Kelly Nestman

Battle of the Classes
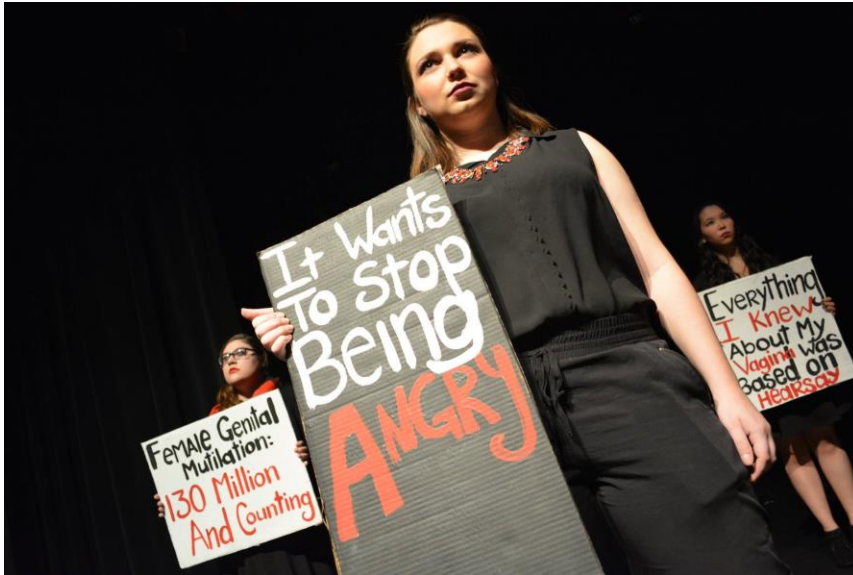
Sisterhood

Family Ties

chatham UNIVERSITY

World Ready Women

chatham
UNIVERSITY

Now…

Where does that leave me?

The Long Purple Line Survey

Jennifer Q. Morse, Deondra Benson, Emma Hahn, Anthony Isacco, Kelly Nestman, Wonjin Sim, Avery Walker

(Light) Mixed Methods Study

- 164 female undergraduates surveyed using an anonymous survey in September
  - Questionnaire about identity, perceptions of diversity, where they do and do not feel a sense of community on campus
  - Free response questions about shift to coeducation
    - How it impacted decision to come or stay
    - Expectation of impact on experience

- How did the shift to co-education change the incoming women?
  - Do returning women differ from first year women?
  - Do returning women feel a sense of community at different places or events?
  - What do both groups say about the shift to coeducation?

Do returning women feel different than first year women?

- Returning women report
  - Feeling more discriminated against
  - Feeling less valued and respected
  - Feeling less able express their opinions freely

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- It didn't (39%)
- I prefer all women's college (15 %)
- It's a negative community change (14%)
- Increased my interest (11%)
- I couldn't transfer (10%)
- It's a positive community change (9%)
- I want to transfer (7%)
- I wouldn't be here if it wasn't coed (7%)
- I hope we keep our values (6%)
- I'm optimistic (5%)
- I don't know (2%)

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- It didn't (39%)
  - "The change to co-education has not influenced my decision to come back to Chatham because at this point I just want to graduate and I don't care if it's all boys, all girls, or all aliens as long as I graduate"

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- I prefer all women's college (15 %)
  - "I came into Chatham expecting a women's college that was for the minority agenda and for the empowerment of women's leadership. I see now less of a push towards encouraging female leadership and more gender washing and keeping policy and wording neutral. Chatham was a women's college and thus should still have a strong interest in bringing up women…."

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- It's a negative community change (14%)
  - "If I wasn't a senior this year, I would have strongly considered transferring. Especially after seeing the students Chatham chose to bring in, I would have loved to leave. I feel that there was no standard for the new students and that the women's focus has been thrown out the window at a historically all women's college. On the other hand, I love my professors and the library staff so they have made it easier to be here"

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- Increased my interest (11%)
  - "It played a big role in choosing to attend Chatham because although I feel like women's leadership is a big part of our society, men have just as big a part to play."

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- I couldn't transfer (10%)
  - "I was a rising Senior - I wasn't about to transfer out and cause myself and victory lap and spend more money and cause stress at a new university. And at the same time, I wanted to be here to form the first year class."

How did coeducation impact your decision to return to/attend Chatham?

- It's a positive community change (9%)
  - "It has made me want to come here even more because the school is progressing towards a more equal standing between the sexes."
  - "I wouldn't have come here if it was still an all-women's school. It's 2015 and it's about time that a progressive University such as Chatham stops the hypocrisy and allows boys in. Soooooo yeah."

Compared to first year women, returning women were

- Equally likely to report that
  - Coeducation didn't impact their decision (40% vs 38%)
  - They expected positive community change (8% vs 9%)
  - That they were optimistic (6% vs 4%)
  - They were unsure of the impact of coeducation (1% vs 3%)

Compared to first year women, returning women were

- More likely to report that
  - They preferred single sex (22% vs 9%)
  - Coeducation was a negative community change (21% vs 8%)
  - They couldn't transfer (21% vs 0%) or wanted to transfer (12% vs 1%)
  - That they hoped to keep Chatham values (10% vs 3%)

Compared to first year women, returning women were

- Less likely to report that
  - Coeducation increased their interest (4% vs 19%)
  - They wouldn't be here if Chatham wasn't coed (2% vs 11%)

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- Negative community change (22.7%)
  - "The parts of Chatham I loved. The sisterhood, the community of casually talking to someone is gone. The focus is on these boys. Not only because they are new and a minority group, not only because there is a focus on the "new community" completely bulldozing the old community, but because people are buying into the idea that they are special. / The interviews of these young men show this. They are talking about the legacy they will leave by default of being the first class, not about the legacy they will leave as a Chatham student."

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- I'm optimistic (12.9%)
  - "I will become more world ready because there are men who I will work with in the real world. Men also offer different perspectives about topics than women."
  - "hopefully it will bring men into the conversion on inequality and have them help the women get to be on an equal playing field."

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- I don't think it will affect me (11%)
  - "I don't think it will affect it much. I am comfortable with the change. I just think more could be done to emphasize the history of Chatham"

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- Positive community change (10.4%)
  - "I believe it will only add to the wonderful experience I've had thus far."

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- Loss of women's empowerment (9.8%)
    - "I feel it will become just another college campus, rather than a college dedicated to women's issues. Even things such as a cheerleading squad feel like a step in the wrong direction, even if the intent is positive."

How do you expect coeducation to impact your experience at Chatham?

- Loss of feminist values (9.8%)
  - "I expect to deal with biases towards me as a woman, which I did not have to deal with before. I also fear I will not be able to express my sexuality as freely, and that the overall atmosphere is slowing changing to be less safe and inclusive."

Compared to first year women, returning women were

- Equally likely to expect
  – Optimism (13% vs 13%)
  – No specific impact of coeducation (13% vs 9%)
  – A normal college experience (7% vs 3%)
  – To keep Chatham values (4% vs 4%)
  – More inclusive community (4% vs 4%)
  – That coeducation was a good move (2% vs 3%)
  – Lower standards (2% vs 0%)

What does it mean?

- Change is hard for everyone
  - Manage expectations
    - Impact of expectations on experiences
    - Continued discussions about coeducation after decisions
      - Make community values explicit
      - Build on optimism
      - Address concerns proactively
    - Consider acculturation as a model
      - Respecting current community and bringing new people in effectively