

# The Effect of ACE Scores on African American Female's College Experience/Performance

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## Abstract

- The rates of African American females attending college has been increasing significantly. In fact, between the years of 1994 and 2012, the rate of African American female's enrollment in college has increased from 48% to 69% , see figure 1 (Lopez & Gonzalez-Barrera, 2014). However, despite this information and research that correlates higher ACE scores with negative college performance/experience there is a large lack of research done on the demographic of African American females.
- Several articles have shown that higher ACE scores are associated with lower GPAs earned in African American females (Watt et al., 2021). In addition, research has reported a correlation between African American females and an increased amount potentially fatal reports of intimate partner violence (IPV) compared to other demographics, which greatly affects college experience of African American females, have been found (Hattery, 2009). This is significant because people with higher ACE scores are less likely to seek help. It is important the colleges are aware of these correlations that ACE scores pose on African American females and implement the proper care needed to further encourage their success in college.
- Therefore, we are recommending that colleges implement more "trauma-informed" practices with college students (Kataoka et al., 2018). This has many applications such as making sure professors are properly informed about the implications of traumatic experiences on college performance/experience and making sure that adequate resources are provided to students with varying levels of ACE scores such as therapy and mentorship. Also, it is important to identify trauma-informed practices that are catered towards the demographic of African American females.

## Methodology

- In our initial research we did not find enough data investigating the impact of ACE scores and African American females in college; substantially between the months of January and February of 2023, the research networks of Jstor and Psychinfo were utilized to search through thousands of peer-reviewed articles and collect data on our hypothesized connections between African American females and ACE scores.
- For our method, we decided to research three separate categories of data: ACES and Black Women, ACES and College Performance/Experience, and Black Women and College Performance/Experience.
- Using the data compiled, we will argue that our hypothesized connections are deserving of further research and offer practices that colleges can implement to promote the success of African American females in college.

## Background

- Adverse Childhood Experiences scores, also known as ACE scores, are essentially a cumulative score of different forms of abuse that a person has experienced in their childhood (HAAVET et al., 2011). ACE scores can affect many societal, economical, and educational aspects of a person's life. Therefore, a higher ACE score is typically associated with issues later in life, specifically in higher education.
- Between the years of 1940 and 2015 in the demographics of white non-hispanics and black non-hispanics, females earned 4 years of college education at higher rates than males, see figure 3 (Guyot & Reeves, 2017). This signifies the need for more support towards female gender as they are entering college and receiving degrees at higher rates.
- Studies also suggest that higher ACE scores are associated with negative experience and performance in college. This is especially a concern since in the U.S. the percentage of children with ACE scores of 2 or more, see figure 2. In the 10 geographical regions analyzed in this figure, the percentage of black non-hispanic children with ACE scores of 2 or more were significantly higher than white non-hispanic children in all 10 regions (Murphey & Sacks, 2018). This shows that African American children are receiving higher ACE scores at younger ages which in result negatively impacts their future.
- Therefore, in the research that I conducted with Amelia Welch, we chose to focus on ACE scores in the demographic of African American females and its influence on their college experience and performance. However, there is a significant lack of research done on the demographic of African American females. It is important to research this group of people, because it allows colleges to understand how to create programs that account for the African American females with varying ACE scores and aid in improving their overall college experience and performance.

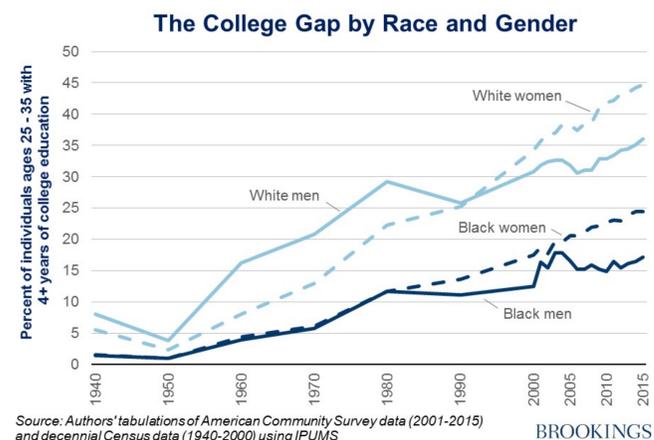


Figure 3: Graph illustrating the college gap by race and gender

## Percentage of children with 2 or more ACEs

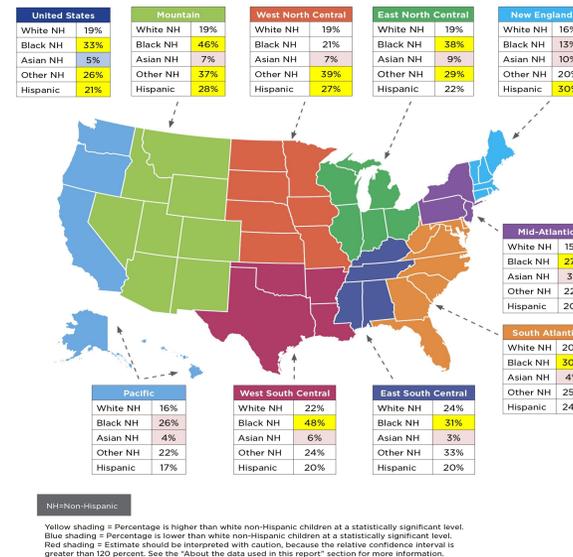


Figure 2: Map illustrating the statistics of children aged in the United States of America that have 2 or more ACEs

## Results

- This research is currently on-going, therefore a formal conclusion has yet to be made. However, there have been multiple findings that have been reached which serve to support the need for more research geared towards the demographic of African American females.
- We identified a link between African American females and potentially fatal cases of IPV, African American women are reporting similar rates of IPV in comparison to the demographic of white females; however, they are more common to report severe and potentially fatal acts of IPV (Hattery, 2009).
- There also is a potential link between ACE scores and low GPAs. According to Hartfiel Watt's journal on ACE scores and its contributions to academic performance differences between races/ethnicities, in comparison to White college students, students of color have a correlation between higher ACE scores and lower GPAs (Watt et al., 2021). It has been identified that this difference has reduced enrollment of students of color into post-secondary education.
- These links show that ACE scores have the potential to impact both educational and social aspects of college for African American females. Amongst African American students in college, females earned 66% of bachelor degrees in 2009 (Baker, 2015).
- These trends demonstrate the increased need for studies on this matter and programs to offer more support to African American females. Research indicates that colleges should offer "trauma-informed" practices to offer more support and promote college success (Kataoka et al., 2018).
- Effective therapy for African American females is different from other demographics and cannot be generalized. Effective therapy techniques according to the American Psychological Association, include making therapy more accessible and promoting self-advocacy (Pappas, 2021). It is also encouraged talk about stigmas and build a community to help African American females cope with important issues that they face like racism, sexism, and trauma.

## Women Outpace Men In College Enrollment

Share of recent high school completers enrolled in college the following October

| Demographic | Year | Women | Men | % point gap, women/men |
|-------------|------|-------|-----|------------------------|
| Hispanic    | 1994 | 52%   | 52% | 0                      |
|             | 2012 | 76    | 62  | +13 women              |
| Black       | 1994 | 48    | 56  | +9 men                 |
|             | 2012 | 69    | 57  | +12 women              |
| White       | 1994 | 66    | 62  | +4 women               |
|             | 2012 | 72    | 62  | +10 women              |
| Asian       | 1994 | 81    | 82  | +1 men                 |
|             | 2012 | 86    | 83  | +3 women               |

Source: Pew Research Center analysis of the October Supplement to the Current Population Survey. Note: % point gap calculated prior to rounding. White, black and Asian include the Hispanic portion of those groups. Due to the small sample size for Hispanics, blacks and Asians, a 2-year moving average is used.

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Figure 1: Table illustrating the statistics regarding college enrollment of females and males across different demographics

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