

*Chi Omega*

JUNIOR EXPERIENCE

# The Junior Experience

Self-Esteem in the Lives of Women

June 2002

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The Best You

### **The Best You**

We all hear incredible success stories about people who have “the right stuff” and truly turn their dreams into realities. What is it that these people possess that enables them to accomplish the unlikely and move ahead even when success appears to be on some distant horizon? In addition to great ability, these people possess a personal strength and confidence that empowers them to take a deep breath and say, “I’m going for it!” Does this mean they have no fear? Certainly not! But it does mean that they do not allow themselves to be overcome by their fear — instead, they choose to take action and be the overcomers! These people are true inspirations and much can be learned by looking at their successes and by reflecting on other successful people each of us has encountered in our own lives. What do we learn from their experiences? How can we transfer their motivation and empowerment to our own lives?

Think about this as you consider the following great achievers. What did they overcome? Do you think they experienced doubt and fear along their path to success?

#### **Lance Armstrong**

Established as one of the leading competitive cyclists in the world, in 1996 at only 25 years old, Armstrong was diagnosed with testicular cancer that had spread to his abdomen, lungs, lymph nodes and brain. Doctors said his odds of survival were only 40 percent. Despite a disheartening diagnosis, Armstrong continued to believe he would race competitively again. Having successfully completed his cancer treatment, including surgery to remove the brain tumors, Armstrong was already back in racing condition by 1998. In 1999, Armstrong entered the Tour de France, the cycling world’s most prestigious race, and won with a record-breaking average speed. He went on to win the Tour de France in 2000 and 2001, becoming a hero to people everywhere, not only in the racing world. His perseverance and commitment to succeed are inspirational and are an encouragement to all.

#### **Jackie Joyner-Kersey**

Watching footage of Jackie Joyner-Kersey make her record-setting long jump, one would never imagine that she battles chronic asthma. Joyner-Kersey decided early in her life that

this disease would not keep her from being the exceptional athlete she knew she could be. Born in East St. Louis, Illinois, Jackie Joyner-Kersey was not a child of financial privilege. However, she was the child of a loving and supportive family who encouraged her to achieve her best. This encouragement and the example set for her by her brother, Olympic track and field star Al Joyner, helped Joyner-Kersey become one of the greatest female athletes in history, holding the world heptathlon record. Joyner-Kersey retired in 1998 and now works as a motivational speaker, sports marketing agent, and has founded the Jackie Joyner-Kersey Community Foundation, which is dedicated to providing opportunities to disadvantaged youth. She is an enduring example of how barriers can be overcome and success achieved through hard work and dedication to your goal.

### **Blanche Lambert Lincoln**

*(Psi chapter, 1981)*

Politics is a field that has historically been dominated by men, so it is not where one typically looks to find female role models. Blanche Lambert Lincoln is helping to rewrite that history and is an excellent source of inspiration for women who desire to chart territories typically reserved for male leaders. In 1998, Blanche Lambert Lincoln became the youngest woman ever elected to the United States Senate. In just her third year as a U.S. Senator, in January 2001, Lincoln became the third woman and the second Democratic woman to ever serve on the powerful Senate Finance Committee. As a representative for Arkansas, Lincoln has made great strides in creating legislation to support rural America, particularly the Mississippi Delta region where her constituency resides. Lincoln is also a wife and mother of twin boys – a true example of a woman going after her dreams, both personal and professional!

### **Sela Ward**

*(Nu Beta chapter, 1976)*

Mention the name Sela Ward, and immediately, an image of a confident, capable and beautiful woman comes to mind. Sela's acting talent and ability are undeniable — and she has two Emmy's and one Golden Globe award to support that claim. However, there is much more to Sela than her beauty. She is truly a woman of substance who is a role model for women everywhere, particularly in the United States where stereotypes seem to define people often more than their individual characteristics do. Sela has found sustained

success as a middle aged woman in the entertainment industry, which is known for “forgetting” actresses once they are past a certain age, particularly once they reach their forties. Middle age is no match for Sela, and neither are the entertainment executives. Sela says she is “a big believer in owning your age so that you can really live authentically.” This is an important motto for women to hear. Age does not define who we are any more than our physical characteristics. It is what we are made of on the inside — our talents, dreams and goals — that truly defines who we are. Many thanks to Sela for reminding us of this important truth!

### **Oprah Winfrey**

“Oprah” is now a household name in America, especially among women. However, her success did not take place overnight; nor was she handed her achievements on a silver platter. Oprah Winfrey was born in Kosciusko, Mississippi, a rural farming community. She had a troubled childhood in which she survived sexual abuse by a number of male relatives and family friends. After moving to Nashville, Tennessee, to live with her father, she entered college in 1971 and began working in radio and television broadcasting. After stints in Baltimore and Chicago on television talk shows, Oprah was recruited to host a show called *A.M. Chicago*, where she earned a number one rating, surpassing the popular Phil Donahue show. In 1986, *The Oprah Winfrey Show* was launched and soon had an audience of ten million viewers, with placement on 120 channels. From this point on, Oprah’s place as a leader in the broadcast industry has only strengthened. She has made further significant marks on the industry through founding Oxygen Media, *O: The Oprah Magazine*, and the launch of *Oprah’s Book Club*, which has proved to be the equivalent of the “Midas touch” for the publishing industry. Her steadfast commitment to providing opportunities for women to learn and grow in all aspects of life continues to define her role as a female leader in American culture.

Life is ours to be spent, not saved.

—D.H. Lawrence



## What is Self-Esteem? Is it just feeling good about myself?

The National Association for Self-Esteem defines self-esteem as a particular way of experiencing the self. It further states:

Self-esteem is the disposition to experience oneself as being competent to cope with the basic challenges of life and being worthy of happiness. It is confidence in the efficacy of our mind, in our ability to think. By extension, it is confidence in our ability to learn, to make appropriate choices and decisions, and respond effectively to change. It is also the experience that success, achievement, fulfillment, and happiness are right and natural for us.<sup>1</sup>

This definition makes good sense, but also leaves one wondering how to really “get a grasp” on one’s self-esteem, which has been defined in such nebulous terms. William Backus, Ph.D., defines self-esteem as:

**“... whatever a person believes about his or her importance, merit, value, worth, significance, or competence.”**

He then breaks the definition down into more concrete terms by differentiating between “good” and “bad” self-esteem. Consider his definitions that follow:

- **Good Self-Esteem:** *Truthful beliefs about oneself*
- **Bad Self-Esteem:** *Untruthful beliefs and erroneous automatic thoughts about oneself – whether they happen to be untruthfully negative or untruthfully positive!*

This set of definitions gives us a context within which we can work to examine our own self-esteem.

You can’t possibly hit the ball if you’re thinking  
about all the possible ways you can miss.

## Messages I Tell Myself...

We are constantly giving ourselves messages — messages that run through our subconscious that we may not even pay attention to — messages that significantly affect our self-concept or self-esteem. If we can focus on these messages, it can help us to determine whether we are dealing honestly with ourselves or if we are saying things that are not true or constructive. This is not an easy thing to do. Think about it — there are so many aspects of our physical selves that we experience daily, yet we are not conscious of them. For example, how do the soles of your feet feel? They may be cold, or itching, or tingling — but chances are, you really have not stopped to think about it today. Now that you are thinking about it, are you much more aware of the sensations on the soles of your feet? That is just like the messages we tell ourselves. They are going on all of the time, but we usually just let them pass by without actively taking notice.

We are about to come to an exercise called “Note to Self...” It is designed to help us take notice of these messages and break them apart to see what it is that we are really telling ourselves. Are we thinking about ourselves logically and truthfully, or are we telling ourselves negative messages that only serve to create self-doubt and fear? This exercise can be a good practice to start — even daily or weekly — it is a good way to take a personal inventory.

No one is useless in this world who lightens  
the burden of another.

—*Charles Dickens*

## Note to Self...

In this activity, take a few minutes to think about the “comments” you make to yourself throughout each day. When you are about to undertake an important task, facilitate a meeting, write a paper — anything that might give you an opportunity to assess yourself.

Make a list of some of the thoughts you have — be specific! It may help to pick one situation to assess.

### Here's an example:

*Situation:* As Director of Friendship and Social, it is my job to plan the Fall Formal. I am going to present my ideas to the chapter tonight. I just know that it's going to cause a huge debate and someone is going to disagree and want to change all of my plans. I get so nervous about this aspect of my job...it's just about impossible to please 100 different women. Sometimes I think they should have slated someone else for this position.

“Comments” I tell myself:

- *Only my close friends will think this is a fun idea. Everyone else is going to think there is some other idea that is better and more unique.*
- *I can think of plenty of other members who are more “fun” than I. Why am I doing this?*
- *There is probably some band I've never heard of that would be better than the one I booked. What if I'm not up on the latest popular bands? How embarrassing...*

In the space provided below, write your own negative thoughts or comments you tell yourself in a particular situation. Be honest so that you can have a true evaluation:

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Next, look back over the comments you have just written. Are these perceptions of you true? Or are they just negative thoughts and images you cast on yourself during times like this? Now continue with the “Through the Looking Glass” activity on the next page. Answer each of the questions in response to each of the statements you just wrote down. This will help you to assess whether you are being honest and objective with yourself.

**Through the Looking Glass –  
Am I Being Honest With Myself?<sup>3</sup>**

- Is there a specific reality or fact upon which I base this statement or idea?

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- What is the best argument I can give to prove this statement or idea is wrong?

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- What are the deeper false beliefs or perceptions that underlie this negative self-assessment?

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- Do I always assess myself in this way (falsely or exaggerated) in situations like this?

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- How can I specifically take steps to change this notion about myself?

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Now that you have taken the time to think about the messages you tell yourself and assess whether you are being truthful with yourself, it is a good idea to think of ways you can encourage yourself. Set yourself up to win and achieve your goals! A good start at doing this is to spend time thinking about what these goals are and how you might accomplish them. Following is an exercise that will help you set a specific goal or ideal that you want to achieve and be reminded of daily. This is a great opportunity to think about the Six Purposes of Chi Omega and how they might play a role in your personal goal setting.

## What's Your Personal Theme?

Having a personal theme can help you to focus on a positive goal or expectation you have of yourself each day. You may let “Healthy Me = Happy Me” be your theme, or “Service Over Self” could be a theme that would remind you to look around and find ways to contribute to others. Remember...this goal may be just for this week to get you through some tough assignments, or it may last the entire year. Your goals will change and develop as you do!

Take a few minutes to reflect on what you would like your personal theme to be. Then write it down or even make a pretty poster with your theme as the message. Post your theme somewhere you will see it daily — next to your make-up mirror, over your alarm clock, or next to your door. Next, write down a few ways in which you can actually practice this theme. If “Service Over Self” is your theme, write several ways you can serve to make your life a true reflection of this theme. For example:

- I will volunteer at the Literacy Council once a month.
- I will send an encouraging note or card weekly to my friend who has a difficult class schedule this semester.

You get the idea! Taking part in an activity like this will help you to see yourself as a valuable person who contributes in meaningful ways to other's lives and to the community in which you live.

### My Personal Theme is:

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### Ways I can practice my Personal Theme in my daily life:

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## Measuring Myself – A Personal Look at Self-Esteem

Sometimes it is helpful to have a tool to use to guide us in our self-evaluation. This can provide a road map to guide our thinking. The following survey is intended for that purpose. It is not a definitive means of assessing your self-esteem. However, it does provide a scoring mechanism and valuable questions to ask of yourself. Answer and calculate your own score. Hopefully, this will be helpful as you consider your own self-esteem.

### Self Esteem Self-Evaluation Survey<sup>4</sup>

Please respond to the following questions using a 1-10 scale:

Lowest    1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10    Highest

1. Did you grow up in a family where there was much love and nurturing? (If you did grow up in a family where there was much love and nurturing, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, give yourself a lower score.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

2. Are you always honest with your feelings when dealing with other people? (If you are always honest with your feelings when dealing with other people, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, give yourself a lower score.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

3. Are you making an attempt to resolve issues in your life, issues that are of great importance to you, or are you avoiding dealing with them? (If you are making an attempt to resolve important issues in your life, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, give yourself a lower score.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

4. Do you ever volunteer to help others, people more needy than yourself? (If you do help others more needy than yourself, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not give yourself a lower score.)

1   2   3   4   5   6   7   8   9   10

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5. Do you anger easily and is your anger often misdirected? (If you do not anger easily, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, then give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

6. How is your eye contact when interacting with others? (If your eye contact is good, give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

7. Are you a heavy smoker, or do you abuse alcohol or drugs? (If you do not smoke or abuse alcohol or drugs, give yourself a 10, 9, or 8.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

8. Are you a risk taker, and one who does not fear failure? (If you are not a risk-taker and one who does fear failure, give yourself a 1, 2, or 3; if you do take risks, and do not fear failure, give yourself a higher score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

9. Are you often ill with colds, the flu, or other minor illnesses? (If yes, give yourself a 1, 2, or 3.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

10. When someone does something that makes you angry, do you tell them how you feel - or do you keep your feelings inside yourself? (If you do not keep your feelings inside yourself, then give yourself a 9 or 10; if you do withhold your feelings, then give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

11. Do you speak your mind when an issue comes up about which you have strong feelings? (If you do speak your mind, then give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, then give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

12. Do you often find yourself telling a lie or a half-truth? (If you do not tell lies or half-truths, then give yourself a 9 or 10; if you do, then give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

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T H E B E S T Y O U

13. Are you compassionate of other people's plights in life? (If you are compassionate of other people's plights in life, then give yourself a 9 or 10; if not, then give yourself a lower score.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

14. Do you ever see yourself as a victim, or do you often feel victimized by other people's actions? (If yes, give yourself a 1, 2, or 3.)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

Your score is: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Total Points**

- |          |   |
|----------|---|
| 120-140  | You more than likely have very high self-esteem.  |
| 90-120   | Your self-esteem is not bad, but could definitely use some work.  |
| Below 90 | You need to look at how you're interacting with other people in your life and begin a program to build your own self-image. |

Enthusiasm is contagious. Start an epidemic.

—*Don Ward*

If you keep doing what you've always done,  
you'll keep getting what you've always got.

—*Peter Francisco*

## Becoming The Best You

We hope that *The Best You* has been a useful in helping you to assess your self-esteem and think about the messages you tell yourself. Take what you have learned and use it to encourage yourself and your sisters as you go about your busy college lives. There are many opportunities to become overwhelmed and let self-doubt creep in. Use some of the exercises you have just completed to remind yourself who the “True You” really is!

Keep the “Best You” in mind as you explore the following sections of *The Junior Experience*. They will address:

- Club Drugs
- Relationship Violence
- Eating Disorders

As we have already mentioned, these are not “stand alone” issues. Rather, there is almost always a deeper issue underlying one of these problems. Think honestly about these topics as you read. Take this opportunity to have a conversation among sisters. What a wonderful opportunity you have as a Chi Omega for a sincere support network of peers who struggle with many of the same issues. Use this wealth of support to your advantage — and extend your own hand and a listening ear to your sisters who may be addressing one of these problems for the first time. Because each of you are so valuable, it is important that you take this opportunity to look honestly at your life and your sisters’ and determine where your strengths are and where you can better yourself...both for your own good and for the good of the valuable relationships you currently have and will develop in the future.

The difference between ordinary and  
extraordinary is that little extra.