

Najiyah Pendleton

Good evening my name is Najiyah Pendleton and today I am here to speak alongside Mrs. Johnson as well as other young women whose lives have been changed through women empowerment, as well as positive mentorships.

Each and every one of us on this earth has a sacred purpose. But see an empowered woman knows her purpose and works every day to make sure she is pursuing that purpose. An empowered woman has goals, dreams and aspirations and will work twice as hard if that's what it takes to achieve them. An empowered woman is not afraid to use her voice and speak for a change even if that means she is outnumbered. I believe that an empowered woman is independent and is in charge of her own happiness. There's no need to wait for anyone, empowered women take the first step and don't turn back, they choose the path and how long of a journey it's going to be.

An empowered woman that fits my ideal definitions is Mrs. Johnson. Since the day I've met Mrs. Johnson she has never settled for anything less than greatness. During a time of struggle and disappointment in my life Mrs. Johnson entered me into a group known as "YWA" (Young Women's Alliance). From the first day that I was enrolled in YWA till today here right now, I can say without hesitation I have changed for the better.

Young Women's Alliance helped me realize that I matter as well as every other woman. As well as you determine what's best for you, people are going to try to tear you down, but will you let them? Young Women's Alliance taught me that it's okay to be independent and seek your own happiness. Last but not least keep your standards high, in such a chaotic world we live in women tend to step down to society's standard, but we are far greater than anyone's set standards. In addition to being a part of the YWA group also came the opportunity for Mrs. Johnson to be my mentor outside of the group. All I could say is I couldn't be more grateful. Mrs. Johnson always sees the great in me. She always tries to help meet my individual needs. Just seeing that someone cared about me and wanted to see me grow, helped me want the same possibilities for myself. I can honestly say Mrs. Johnson has helped bring the leader out in me. Now that I am able to view all the things Mrs. Johnson saw in me in myself I've gained so much more confidence within myself.

After Milton Hershey School, I plan to attend Millersville University to Major in Early Childhood Education. Which I then plan to come to Milton Hershey School and teach elementary students at the school that changed my life for the better. "To whom much is given, much is expected."

Thank you for your time!

Diana Creech

Growing up, I had female figures in my life, but they didn't always have a positive influence on me. My whole life, I had this incredibly inaccurate perception of womanhood. I thought women had a role to fill. I thought I was meant to fall into this role: to be a good wife, raise kids and rely on a man to bring in all of the income. I figured I didn't get to decide what I wanted to be. I thought I was destined to do what "all women do." I had never learned to own who I am and be what I wanted to be. Due to this, I had low self-esteem. My confidence was tainted. I was at a low point - I began using unhealthy coping methods to deal with my emotions. Luckily for me, there was an escape from my downward spiraling. In the spring of 2015, my sisters and I applied for Milton Hershey School. Once we were enrolled, the game changed. I slowly began breaking down the stereotypes in my head and replacing them with an exciting reality: I could be whatever I wanted. I was free to embrace who I was. This is what women's empowerment means to me: knowing who you are, and embracing it.

Coming into high school was a scary thing. I didn't know what to expect, but the rumors I'd heard gave me enough of an idea. I was terrified. I attended an activities fair soon after the school year started, and I came across the YWA table. The girls there seemed friendly and open, and they encouraged me to sign up. I figured, why not. I went to the first meeting and sat through the introduction of current members and Mrs. Johnson herself. When I learned what YWA was all about, I wanted in. I knew I would benefit; I was shy, quiet, and unsure of myself. Then I learned that the group had limited space and could only take nine girls total. I was positive I wouldn't get in: I was too quiet for Mrs. Johnson to notice. So, there I sat, quiet in my chair while Mrs. Johnson talked on. Later that week, I got an email: I had been chosen to be a member of YWA. I was beyond ecstatic, but I was also shocked. I thought I had gone unnoticed at that first meeting. But I didn't. Mrs. Johnson saw something in me. She knew I needed YWA, and she made sure to get me a spot. Going into 2018 marks two full years of YWA. Aside from YWA, I also participate in Girl's Grace, one of Mrs. Johnson's other programs. Through Girl's Grace, I've learned many important skills, including networking, branding, and money management. I'm so glad that Girls Grace is available to all of the female high school students at our school - it gives them the chance to experience some of Mrs. Johnson's mentoring skills on a small scale.

Because of these programs, I've had stupendous growth. Since I've joined YWA, I've become confident, more outspoken, more social and more aware of who I am and who I want to become. Mrs. Johnson has challenged me create my own values and realize what's important to me. Anyone who's known me since I've joined can attest to my spectacular growth. The changes I've experienced are life-changing, and they will have a lasting effect on me. When I graduate from Milton Hershey School, I plan on attending Lehigh University to major in mechanical engineering. I want to be bold and pursue what I'm passionate about using the skills Mrs. Johnson has taught me. Without her, I wouldn't be the young woman I am today. Her unapologetic nature - not afraid of being herself, her confidence, her drive. It inspires me. She has shown me a true example of what a woman should be and pushed me to be the best version of myself. I want to be a mentor to others like she is to me. I'm not sure where I would be without Mrs. Johnson's mentoring and programs like YWA. I certainly wouldn't have the courage to give this speech today. But it's things like this Mrs. Johnson pushes me to do. To step outside of my comfort zone. To be bold. To be brave. And for that, I will be forever grateful. Thank you.

I'yonna Jones

For most young adults, like myself, or women in general, the issue of confidence is something that is rarely confronted, yet it plays a major role in the level of success that we achieve as individuals. The level of confidence that we possess has the power to dictate how and if we choose to pursue our goals, long term or short. If a woman possesses an adequate amount of confidence, there is no telling what she will do with it. She could reserve it, and keep it solely for herself; she can boast about it, and place herself on a superior pedestal; or she can embrace it and share it with others around her.

So, what is women empowerment? This is a controversial topic that raises many questions. Women empowerment means different things to different people, so there is no set definition. But from the many experiences that I have encountered I've come to realize that women empowerment is simply self-love and equality. Often made synonymous to gender equality, the term women empowerment encompasses a much larger set of principles that needs whole-hearted attention. The concept of empowerment flows from the word power. In this case, the power to accept women as individuals that are capable of making rational and educated decisions about themselves and society as well. Especially since the odds are sometimes against women. Not only in the workforce, but in our everyday lives as well. Certain injustices women face daily have slowly become accepted and transformed into social norms, and that's simply not okay. Women empowerment is enabling women to prioritize themselves and their needs to live life on their terms. And this is what My coach, Mrs. Johnson does, on and off of her work hours. She has incorporated self-love and equality into an event that is meant to encourage young girls to be themselves, and to always push for more in life.

Coming from a family that installed the important of confidence in me, I was already comfortable with myself and my composure as a female. But like a normal person, I had those moments when I would feel uncertain about myself and my purpose. Times like those is when I would need a reminder, and that's what Girls Grace was for me, a reminder that I am and I will be something. A reminder to never live let social norms, rules, and other people's expectation govern my life and my decisions.

In the near future I hope to attend Georgetown University, and major in international relations or political science. After earning my degree, I will attend law school to become a human rights lawyer, to speak up for those with no voice, and promote human rights on social, regional, and domestic levels.

Thank you.

Nashaya Goodman

Women empowerment means knowing and praising the fact there is no limit to what women can accomplish. It is giving women the freedom to make their own decision - rather it be in the field of work or sports - without judgement, but instead with support. Women empowerment is not Anti-Man. Instead, it is a concept that encourages people to take a step back and think about our social and economic beliefs in regards to everyone; and how one can build strength in others, especially woman.

Girls Grace has opened my eyes to the power of a simple conversation. Fortunately, or unfortunately, I have had a chance to experience a year in high-school with, and a year without, Girls Grace. The year with Girls Grace provided me with examples of positive women interactions. It brought us high-school girls together without jealousy or drama. It gives us something to look forward together and something to talk about all year. The year following, without Girls Grace or YWA, forced me to realize the lack of women power on TV, the classroom, and elsewhere. This has led to an increase in my admiration of Mrs. Johnson and her goal for this program. Without a doubt, I will not miss this year's event. Because of Girls Grace and its mission, I want to better understand and support my fellow ladies. The love I felt through my simple conversations at Girls Grace was worth wild, and I want more.

I have had a chance to admire Mrs. Johnson from afar. I have seen the respect she automatically gets from her students and cheerleaders, this respect does not come from fear or hate, but simply because students appreciate how she carries herself and how she interacts with them. With this example, as well as with the example of other women our on campus; such as our religious leader, Mrs. Hopkins and our Student Government Association Coordinator, Mrs. Weber I have worked on carrying myself in this matter. I now strive to walk with confidence and talk with assertiveness. I believe that displaying this behavior will encourage my peers to act the same. Subsequently, making the Milton Hershey girl community ten times stronger.

After attending Milton Hershey School, I hope to attend West Chester University, majoring in marketing. However, my ultimate goal is to be a mother. Not just a mother to my own blood children, but a mother to those lacking one. I want to provide children with a safe place. A safe place or person where they can express them self, explore themselves, and enhance them self. With the examples of women empowerment and respect showed by Mrs. Johnson as well as other leaders on our campus, I am more than confident that I have already started to gain the confidence needed to reach this goal.