



Georgia Hill Alumnae Class of 2015

speech from International
Women's Day Breakfast
10/3/23

Good morning, teachers, special guests and our future scientists, coders, doctors and so so much more...

For those of you that don't know me my name is Georgia and for those that do my name is still Georgia. I was the class of 2015 here at Academy so I have been released to fend for myself for about 8 years and the last time I was standing up here TikTok was just a Keshia song, the closest I had been to a pandemic was watching Outbreak in year 10 science so it has been quite a while since I have spoken at the lectern so forgive me if I am a little rusty. I guess you would think in all that time I would have done a lot with myself but I am still at uni. You might be wondering why I am still at uni 8 years later.... Don't worry I wonder the same thing ... often.

The truth is I am still studying for three main reasons. I love what I study, I have a brilliant support network and I have learned to back myself. Which can sometimes be a really hard and polarising thing to admit, especially as a young woman where we have to navigate lots of complicated assumptions and misconceptions.

This year's international women day theme is 'Cracking the Code: Innovation for a gender equal future' as well as being a nice jazzy title it gives us a great opportunity to celebrate achievement and reflect on some of the challenges that lie ahead. Although I haven't cracked many codes, I am hoping that my journey through the sciences and into medicine might be able to provide some interesting insight. I often think of how strange it would be to go back and tell the Georgia that scraped through VCE chemistry she would end up doing a biochemistry degree. But I have been so incredibly lucky, I made the decision to pursue the path I did when I was teenager because I was never discouraged or made to feel like it wasn't a good fit. I think this was perhaps a product of going to a lovely warm all girls school. I mean this is a very soft, comforting environment, we braided each other's hair in the hallways, hugged each other to say hello and where we celebrated every achievement with a choreographed dance routine. I still remember when Julia Gillard became prime minister, Sr Mary made an impassioned announcement over the loudspeaker and all the girls in my year 7 dance class hugged. That feels like a pretty uniquely girls school experience and as lovely as it is unfortunately it is not hugely reflective of the outside world.

Sort of like when Troy Bolton gets to university and realizes he can't break into song each time he gets emotional. That was me when I got to uni and realized gender politics existed. I was first confronted with this reality when I had this frankly awful lab class called 'Techniques in Molecular Sciences' and I arrived on the first day of class to my all male lab group laughed at my sparkly boots and I never wore them again and look in hindsight they might have been doing me a favour but they made feel incongruous to have a biochemistry degree and a sense of fashion.

It would be brilliant if the STEM fields were run by women. I think lots of discoveries would have been made a whole lot quicker. I know my mum can find anything I have misplaced around the house. But unfortunately only 14% of young women entering uni choose science related fields compared to nearly 40% of men. There is a whole mess of reasons why these differences exist but one of the best explanations is the influence of cultural expectations.

When thinking about the impact of culture and context on the way we behave I like to think about this study that was conducted quite a few years ago now but is ridiculously cool. It showed that when people held a warm cup of coffee while talking to someone they felt warmer towards that person and when people were told to carry clipboards they behaved more confidently. These examples might seem a bit reductive and I know we like to think we are completely in charge of all the decisions but it shows that context really does influence the way we behave and the interest that blossoms as a result.

When I was at school my maths folder was always blue and science was always green and in the same way there is the mental categorisation of professions as male or female. I can't tell you how many times I have been asked if I am studying nursing despite walking around with a name tag that says student doctor. Don't get me wrong, nursing is a brilliant ambition but I think this assumption proves that gender still has influence in these spaces and women going onto so-called pink collared jobs is the expectation.

I don't think things are all doom and gloom. The really beautiful thing about culture is it is informed by people, so we have the tools to change this reality sitting right here in the room. There are so many supportive and inspiring women and plenty of bright ambitious girls here. For me, the importance of good role models cannot be understated. There is this brilliantly telling study where the researchers arranged for female undergraduates to talk to an actor pretending to be a computer programmer. If the actor wore a dorky shirt that said "I code therefore I am" and spoke about Star Wars and video games the students expressed far less interest in studying science than if the actor wore a plain t-shirt and spoke about hanging out with her friends. I don't bring this up to emphasize the importance of good wardrobe choice but instead to highlight the importance of strong role models that girls can see pieces of themselves reflected in.

It is really hard as a teenage girl to see yourself as a scientist if all you see are crazy haired Einsteins and it is really hard to see yourself as a doctor when all you can see is RM Williams clad private school boys. So I think it is so important to look at the wonderful women in your life, my mum is a nurse and her incredible medical stories meant that I could see a future in the hospital. You don't have to look to those older than you, you can also look by your side and find inspiration in your friends and sisters. I was at dinner with my high school friends the other week and I realized there was a physio, a psychologist, a lawyer, photographer, teacher, speech path and town planner as well as having nearly all the occupations of the village people covered and these wonderful women have been such an incredible source of motivation for me. I can without a doubt say the greatest asset to my career has been the women I have had around me, still my favourite memory from getting into med school is the hug I got from my mum and sister and the bottle of champagne I shared with my friends although the memory of that one is a bit hazy.

Science and medicine require women. Computer scientists and engineers are going to be designing the future we inhabit which makes it so incredibly important to see female representation, I dread a male designed future that does not see the value in sparkly boots. In my own life I like to think about how my graduating year at medical

school is majority female, a fact that would have seemed like an unreal dream to my grandmother but has been so vital in improving medicine. Research has shown the acceptance of women in medicine has vastly improved the quality of patient care, just yesterday in the lecture theatre we were comfortably able to talk

about medication for menopause because of the female perspectives in the room. What I am trying to say is there is a really important place for women in these spaces but It takes serious ambition to carve that position out. So don't let anyone tell you you can't do anything.. except maybe the police listen to them, but don't let anyone make you feel like you need to tone back your goals to fit cultural assumptions or expectations.

The greatest weapon you have is your own ambition and the inspiration from those next to you. I want to leave you with a really simple message: you can do it, do it for the women that came before you, those sitting next to you, those that will come after you and importantly do it for yourself because you deserve to be doing something you are proud of.

