

Women's Rights Action Group Speaker: Abigail G

Hi all! I want to start out by saying that I am really grateful for the technology and all the helpful people that have enabled us to be here together this morning. Despite the troubling times we are in, I feel blessed that I am able to speak alongside these lovely ladies about women's history month. I am here today to talk about what older women can do to support younger women, and my experiences as a young adult with feminism in today's world of social media.

I'd like to start off by sharing a story with y'all that my mom has told me a few times. When I was about three or four years old, we were spending time with my grandmother and she asked me to take the milk from the fridge and give it to my mother. Simple instructions, but I said, "No." and my grandma said "oh please just give it to your mom!" and I said, "No. You can do it yourself!" My mom now says that's when she knew I was going to be a strong, stubborn, and independent woman. I really like this story and I think it is a great example of intergenerational differences in attitude and expectations of women.

I know that my grandmother and my mother and I all grew up in very different time periods and in very different households. My grandma grew up in a rural small town and worked on a farm,, my mother had no siblings up till she was almost 12 years old,, and I've stayed right here in lake forest as the youngest of three children. Despite any differences we have there are always things that we can learn from one another. I have learned some very tangible things from my grandmother and mother, like how to make a pecan pie and how to sew. But I've also learned invaluable things like the right way to help a friend in need and how to be kind to people you might not understand. Being open to learning from different generations is a really important part of feminism for me. If I can learn from the women who came before me; learn their mistakes and learn their successes, then I can do more to help my generation. It is important for youth to listen to our elders, but it is also important for them to listen to and learn from us. I value being open to asking grandma questions and learning her wisdom, but I also value the times that I can answer her questions to help her understand my experience.

One thing that I have often been successful at helping my grandparents with is technology, but I know that I still use it a lot more than they do :)

Technology is a really important part of how feminism, women's rights, and activism in general comes into my life. Social media, in the form of snapchat and instagram mostly, is a really great way that I am able to connect with people no matter how far away they are. I have stayed in touch with lots of friends from Camp DeBennville Pines through social media (and it's especially valuable to me in this time of staying at home, being quarantined).

But social media is also useful for connecting with people that I never could meet in real life. Through Instagram I can see other people's opinions and ideas that they share from

all over the world. Without social media, I'd never hear about people like Greta Thunberg with her amazing Fridays For Future climate strikes.

Although a lot of good can come from social media, I also must acknowledge that it can sometimes be a way to spread hate and anger. I've seen people who use social media to force their opinions onto others, to spread misinformation, or to create turbulence for no reason. Sometimes it is hard to avoid the negativity, but you usually have some choice in what type of content you see.

I try to follow more positive accounts that I think are sending out good messages to the world. One such account is the @feminist account on Instagram. It is a well curated page that features artists, comics and funny, relevant tweets. Some of their posts are more political, taking a critical look at America's leaders. But some of their posts are more lighthearted with goofy memes of Disney princesses or Lisa from the Simpsons. They also emphasize women's rights; highlight where healthcare is lacking for women, and include important messages about access to menstrual products. They promote intersectional feminism and equality with their beautiful posts of photoshoots with women of diverse sizes and colors. The @feminist bio explains feminism as "the radical belief that we are all equal." Pages like this remind me why I really appreciate the platform of Instagram. There is an amazing ease of sharing information and showing my friends what is important to me when I can send them posts from this account or tell them to follow it and spread the positive and helpful messages.

One other way that I have recently felt the benefits of good vibes through Instagram was when earlier this week someone tagged me in a post of #spreadpositivity. It was a challenge that asked for women to support each other and build each other up, in these troubling times where a lot of fear and stress has been dominating the media. All it took was posting a picture of yourself and then tagging some more gorgeous women you know to spread the word and make each other feel great. Sometimes these chainmail-like messages can be annoying or feel silly, but I liked the message behind this one. Women all too often find it easier to criticize one another or tear each other down, especially in social media where it is easy to be anonymous, but what we should be doing is lifting each other up, supporting each other, and making everyone happier in the process.

Although older people in my life don't use technology or social media quite as much as I do, my parents are quite good at Facebook and are starting to use Instagram more often, with some helpful tips from their youngest child of course :) Teaching my parents and grandparents about the things I learn on social media can be very interesting. I always appreciate being able to help them understand my world, and what's coming in the future. I also value hearing their opinions and comparing what the world was like in their teenage years with what my world is like now. The most important thing for the future of feminism is continual learning, learning from elders and peers alike. When we can learn from each other's experiences we can understand each other better and work together better. And together we are unstoppable. Thank you.