
An Honest Reflection from a Black Girl's Perspective

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Published in: *The Philanthropist*

ISSN: 2562-1491

Date: September 2, 2019

Original Link: <https://thephilanthropist.ca/2019/09/an-honest-reflection-from-a-black-girls-perspective/>

Date of PDF Download: September 14, 2020

Malaya Douglas is one of four winners of [a 2019 writing contest](#) for young women hosted by The Philanthropist and the Girls Conference.

This is my second time attending the Girls Conference at Mount Saint Vincent University, and it has improved since the first time. The focus and themes are confidence building, leadership skills, personal and professional growth, developing stronger minds and bodies, ideas and opinions about effective strategies for expressing yourself, and new ways to explore making a difference in your communities.

My experience from the conference has been positive both years. All the classes that I attended were very informative and fun, but the class that stood out to me the most was "Only Yes Means Yes." This workshop provided an opportunity for participants to learn about their legal rights and responsibilities when it comes to sexual relationships. "Yes means yes" basically means that a person must give clear consent before engaging in sexual activity. Nobody has the right to touch another person's body without the other person's consent. If they do, they can be charged under the Criminal Code of Canada. Some people in this class were brave enough to talk about their own personal experiences on this topic. Hearing them talk about this made me realize how important it will be to pick a partner who treats me with respect and supports me when I need it the most.

After the class discussions, the two facilitators read us two court cases about consent. One of the cases was *R v Ewanchuck*. This case was about a woman who went for a job interview and the man who interviewed her touched her in a sexual manner, even after she said "no" to him multiple times. The definition of sexual assault was tested in the Supreme Court of Canada on this matter. This case stood out to me because I am considering a career in law, possibly

following in the footsteps of my father, who is one of two human rights lawyers for the Nova Scotia Human Rights Commission. I feel very passionate about human rights issues, particularly people being treated fairly and respectfully, regardless of their race, gender, physical/mental ability, sexual orientation, or religion.

When I attended the conference, I noticed it was diverse in the sense of me seeing participants from various ethnic and cultural backgrounds and religions. It was nice to attend an event and not be the only African Nova Scotian in the room. It is my belief that more people will want to attend the conference because the diversity creates a welcoming environment that promotes inclusion.

A life lesson I took away from this conference is the importance of working hard, believing in yourself and your skills, and having a positive attitude. I am continuing to learn that if I go into a situation with a positive attitude, it is more likely that I will have a positive experience. Also, if I believe in myself and put in the work, it is more likely that I will get positive results. I continue to work everyday to live by these life lessons and so far they have proven to be helpful. In general, I feel these are good lifelong lessons to live by because they are the key to having a successful career and positive life experience. I am very grateful to have been given the opportunity to attend the Girls Conferences for the past two years and I am hopeful to be given the opportunity to continue attending in the future.