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**Year in school:** MS3

**First year of national AMWA membership:** 2024

**Prompt 1:** Dr. Linda Brodsky often drew strength from powerful words and quotes to sustain her during moments of struggle. If you had to choose one word that captures your vision for gender equity in medicine, what would it be? In your essay, share the word you chose and explain why it resonates with you. Tell a personal story from your life or training that illustrates the meaning of this word, and reflect on how it connects to Dr. Brodsky’s mission of helping women physicians “get the jobs they want, be paid what they deserve, and have it all.” Conclude by describing how you will carry this word with you as you continue your career in medicine.

*Empowered to Pursue a Career in Medicine*

If I had to choose just one word that captures my vision for gender equity in medicine, it would be “empowered.” Empowerment, to me, refers not only to capability and confidence, but also the feeling of being comfortable taking up space, speaking with conviction, and pursuing one’s personal and professional goals without hesitation.

I learned the meaning of empowerment long before I ever considered pursuing a career in medicine and stepped into a hospital. My mother grew up in a humble household—her mother taught Sunday school and her father worked as an electronics repair man. She was the first in her family to attend and graduate from college and then law school. Throughout my childhood, I listened as she recounted stories of being the only woman in a courtroom, having her ideas interrupted or bypassed until they were repeated by male colleagues, and receiving compliments on her earrings or the style of her suit as opposed to the quality of her work. I noticed how, in the face of gender bias, my mother never responded by making herself smaller or quieter. Instead, she became more assured of her own voice and more determined to carve a path for herself and

the other women coming after her where no path had previously existed. She did all of this while balancing the demands of her career and busy home life with three children.

While it could have been simple for my mother to build resentment and bitterness, what has stuck with me most is the way she used her personal experiences, both negative and positive, to empower my two older sisters and I when we were children and teenagers and even into our adulthoods. She instilled in us that our gender should never limit our ambitions and often reminded us that being the only woman in the room does not mean that we do not belong there. Recently, during my six-week vascular surgery clinical rotation during my third year of medical school, the conference room for morning rounds and every operating room seemed to be filled with male attending physicians, fellows, residents, and other medical students. I remained acutely aware, however, that instead of feeling out of place, it was the sense of empowerment that I had gained from attending an all-girls middle school, being encouraged by my family and teachers to pursue challenging academic courses in high school and college, and looking up to strong female role models including my mom, that allowed me to feel a sense of belonging in those majority-male clinical spaces. Even in medical school, as I work towards pursuing a career in ophthalmology, which largely remains a male-dominated field, I am empowered by my upbringing and my mother's trailblazing.

This sense of empowerment aligns with Dr. Linda Brodsky's mission to help women physicians "get the jobs they want, be paid what they deserve, and have it all." My vision is for women in medicine to be empowered to ask for and take on the leadership positions that they have earned, advocate for fair compensation, and create a lifestyle that allows for both their professional and personal fulfillment without feeling limited by the traditional gender

composition of those roles. From my own experience of being empowered to reach my goals, I know that empowerment creates an internal force to overcome and even speak out against external barriers to equity. I hope that in the future, all women in medicine feel similarly empowered to speak up for equal pay and equal workplace opportunities for themselves and their female counterparts.

Going forward, as I progress in my medical career, I will carry the word *empowered* with me as both a personal reminder and a commitment to others. I want to uplift the voices of women around me, especially those who, like my mother, come from modest beginnings or those who find themselves breaking barriers alone. I hope to create clinical and academic spaces where female trainees feel not only included, but valued, heard, and supported in the pursuit of their highest aspirations. Empowered is the word that shaped me and reflects the equity I hope to build in medicine. It is the word that I will carry with me and impart to other female trainees and women in ophthalmology throughout my career.

**Bio:**

Haley Evans (she/her) is a third-year medical student at Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University. Haley is originally from Brookline, Massachusetts. She graduated with her Bachelor of Science in Psychology from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill in 2021, after which she worked in scientific research and scale development at WCG Clinical. Now, in medical school, Haley is on the executive boards of the Thomas Duane Ophthalmology Society and the Wills Access Free Ophthalmologic Clinic, and is a member of The Lens Podcast, working to make ophthalmology more accessible to trainees and to expand access to eye care services for underserved communities.