

RAISA MASUD



In ninth grade, Raisa learned about the soulful endurance and contagious ardor of children in village orphanages, where she taught for a year in India and Bangladesh. During her summers before and after enrolling at Penn, she interned at Grameen Bank (a microfinance institution that offers collateral-free loans), and with barristers working to apply national law in rural and urban courts in Bangladesh. She has, moreover, spent a semester interning for the Judicial Strengthening Project—a joint collaboration by United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the Supreme Court of Bangladesh. Last summer, she loved working for a leading female lawyer in New York. At Penn, she has served as a Vice President for Women in Leadership Series. Also, she has been the Bangladesh Team Director for Penn Microfinance. Raisa majors in Political Science; through ABCS classes, she has volunteered in Philadelphia public middle schools and high schools as well as prisons. Raisa plans to attend law school.

CAPSTONE PROJECT

RECONSTITUTION OF EQUALITY: LEGAL BACKDROP AND THE UNREALIZED PROMISE OF GENDER EQUALITY IN THE LEGAL PROFESSION

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The blanket consensus that emerges in the legal world today locates the profession at an important inflection point. On the one hand, the number of women entering the profession has reached newfound male-female parity. But on the other hand, women leaders in the legal world are a rarity. Even when adjusted for the fact that women did not begin to enter the legal profession in significant numbers until the 1970s, the percentage of women lawyers in positions of leadership lags significantly behind their overall representation. Even women in prominent positions in the field have left the profession in startling numbers. In this context, this paper illuminates the rich and often challenging role of the law as an instrument of social change using the legal profession as a case study. First, this paper argues that a vastly greater social consciousness of gender discrimination after *Brown v. Board of Education* created a platform of constitutional change toward gender equality. Because of Ruth Bader Ginsburg's legal advocacy, the Court struck down law after law that treated men and women differently because of gender. Second, this paper argues that further social change is required to achieve greater gender equality for women lawyers in the legal profession. This paper employed content-analysis to track and compare arguments found in amicus curiae briefs, legal briefs, opinions, and dissents. It analyzed data from legal research databases and administered an extended questionnaire survey of four women lawyers. Significantly, this paper finds that today women lawyers still encounter more challenges than their male colleagues in achieving important leadership positions. The findings in this paper are relevant to all of those who care about the role of law in society: a legal world in which women lawyers have less opportunity to succeed than their male colleagues threatens the very legitimacy with which America views its laws and the legal profession.