

### Equal Opportunity & The Law

The film *On The Basis of Sex* documents Ruth Bader Ginsburg's journey in her never ending quest for gender equality. The film gives an excellent depiction of the prejudice and gender bias that women endured prior to the women's rights movement. Screenwriter, Daniel Stiepleman, who was also her nephew, did his best to illustrate her passion and resolve in overcoming the challenges that were imposed by a society where discrimination on the basis of sex was legal.

Ruth Bader Ginsburg, also known as "RBG", was one of nine women in a class of five hundred students who were admitted to Harvard Law School in 1956. This was only the sixth year that women had been allowed to attend Harvard. At the time, Harvard was a male-dominated school and women were often chastised for taking a man's spot. However, despite all the negativity and prejudice she had to endure at the hands of the men occupying the highest positions of authority there, she excelled and was top her of class by her second year.

RBG's husband, Marty Ginsburg, would not have been able to graduate from Harvard Law School, while battling testicular cancer in his third year, without her help. She successfully juggled caring for her young daughter, collecting his class work, and typing his papers, all while pursuing her own law degree. When her family relocated and Harvard refused to allow her to finish her final year of coursework at another university in order to award her a Harvard Law degree, she was forced to get her degree from Columbia Law School.

She went on to excel at Columbia Law School as well, graduating top of her class and becoming the first woman to make both the Harvard and Columbia Law Reviews. Yet despite her steel determination and the level of excellence she continually demonstrated, she was rejected by every law firm she applied to after graduating law school and was forced to accept a position at Rutgers University as a Professor.

RBG had a true partner in Marty Ginsburg. It was he who first discovered the case of Charles Moritz, the traveling salesman who hired a nurse to care for his elderly mother but was prevented from claiming the expense as a tax deduction because he was a bachelor. His unwavering support and respect were crucial in the successful outcome of *Moritz v. Commissioner of Internal Revenue*. This was the case where the Court first held that discrimination on the basis of gender constituted a violation of the Equal Protection Clause of the United States Constitution. Her success in winning this appeal helped RBG pave the way for gender equality one case at a time.

While we have seen many improvements towards ending gender discrimination, we are all aware that the task is still to be completed. Women today are still not compensated at the same rate as men despite performing similar jobs with similar qualifications and responsibilities. According to the American Association of University of Women (AAUW):

“Women working full time in the U.S. are paid 82 cents to every dollar earned by men - but it doesn’t stop there. The consequences of this gap affect women throughout their lives. Though women now outpace men in higher education, women also hold nearly two-thirds of the outstanding student debt in the United States. And because of the gender pay gap, women have a harder time repaying loans. The pay gap even follows women into retirement: As a result of lower lifetime earnings, they receive less in Social Security and pensions. In terms of overall retirement income, women have only 70% of what men do.”

There have been many instances in recent years where sexual harassment has been in the news. It is a problem that continues to rear its ugly head in positions of government and in the private. I have worked in both, companies that do their absolute best to ensure that sexual harassment does not occur in the workplace and companies who turn a blind eye to indiscretions performed by males in supervisory roles.

Historically we have observed that it is not enough for legislation to be passed that says discrimination of all kinds should not happen. We need to support leaders who are trying to continue the legacy that RBG began. We need to continue to educate our managers and leaders so that we can create workplace cultures that encourage diversity and organizations free of discrimination. We need to start holding our government leaders and peers accountable so that all these injustices can be eradicated.