

Justice Sotomayor, your many accomplishments, some of which Stephanie just described, speak for themselves. And your public service alone would be ample reason to honor you. But I think it's fair to say that you inspire us—collectively, as Yale Law Women—because of so much more than those accomplishments.

After we announced that you were this year's recipient of the award, we asked women at the law school to tell us, in their own words, why they consider you a powerful role model. As I organized our thoughts into a letter you'll receive shortly, a common theme emerged: your character.

As women in a profession that is not always welcoming, we sometimes feel like outsiders. That feeling can be compounded by our ethnic, socioeconomic, and personal backgrounds. Remaining true to ourselves—being honest about our histories and passionate about our values—is more difficult than many of us, myself included, had expected before arriving here.

But there are people who have helped us maintain our sense of self and our sense of purpose. And for those of us here, you have been one of the most important of those people.

From your memoir—which, trust me, we've all read, underlined, and bookmarked—we learned that bravery comes in many forms. That fully owning, to ourselves, all of our differences and our insecurities requires an effort no less courageous than speaking out against prejudice and discrimination. For many of us, coming to law school was a reminder that our identities as humans remain a salient aspect of how we are measured as advocates. And it is easy to lose ourselves in thinking about what we struggle with and what we are not, especially here, with such talented and brilliant classmates. But you have reminded us that what we might consider disadvantages can instead be sources of empowerment.

Through your opinions—which have been thought provoking and compelling, regardless of ideology—we hear a strong woman who has navigated the legal world on her own terms. You legitimized compassion and empathy as signs of strength in an environment not known for its accessibility. As we read statutes and cases from past centuries, the law oftentimes seems abstract and slow to change. But you have reminded us to take care with the language we use and the reasoning we marshal, because our choices actively shape the lived realities of those whose voices don't carry as far as ours do in the classroom or the courtroom. You have shown us that claiming new spaces within our societal institutions is both possible and essential for women, minorities, and youth.

Yale Law Women Alumnae Achievement Award

Julia Shu

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I'll conclude by referring back to your memoir, which resonated so deeply with me as well as with as my classmates. In discussing how your book would be received, you stated: "I will be judged as a human being by what readers find here. There are hazards to openness, but they seem minor compared with the possibility that some readers may find comfort, perhaps even inspiration, from a close examination of how an ordinary person, with strengths and weaknesses like anyone else, has managed an extraordinary journey."

I hope that, today, we have assured you that your words have comforted and inspired. I hope that we, as Yale Law Women, have conveyed the depth of our appreciation for you not simply as a Justice, or as a Yale alumna, but as a human being.

And now, it is my honor to present you with the 2014–2015 Yale Law Women Alumnae Achievement Award, in recognition of your amazing contributions to advancing the status of women in the legal profession and society at large. Congratulations, and thank you.