

EDITORS' REMARKS

JENNA LAUTER & SARAH ORTLIP-SOMMERS*

These remarks by our editors opened and closed the *Are You There Law? It's Me, Menstruation* Symposium Conference on April 9 and 10 of this year. Amidst the global pandemic, participants gathered virtually on Zoom for two days of engaging presentations by our Symposium authors and vibrant discussions among scholars, practitioners, and students alike.

FRIDAY – OPENING

JENNA LAUTER: Thank you all for joining us this morning. We are delighted to welcome you to the *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law's* Volume 41 Symposium, *Are You There Law? It's Me, Menstruation*. I'm Jenna Lauter, Symposium Editor for the *Journal*.

SARAH ORTLIP-SOMMERS: And I'm Sarah Ortlip-Sommers, Editor-in-Chief. 2021 marks thirty years since the *Journal of Gender and Law* was founded at Columbia Law School. We are so proud of the forty volumes we have published over the past three decades, featuring interdisciplinary feminist scholarship on topics including reproductive health and justice, constitutional law, international and comparative legal perspectives, the rights of the LGBTQIA+ community, climate change, racial disparities in gender justice, and many, many more. As the movement for gender justice has and continues to evolve, we aim to continue moving our feminist legal community forward, centering intersectionality, racial justice, and queer, trans, and nonbinary voices.

Over the years, we have also been incredibly lucky to benefit from the guidance of one particularly notable Columbia Law School alumna, Ruth Bader Ginsburg. We mourn her incalculable loss last September together with the entire legal community. Justice Ginsburg's legacy is very special to our *Journal*. As a member of our Board of Advisors and the school's first female tenured law professor, Justice Ginsburg has been a guiding light for students serving on our staff since the *Journal's* inception. In her introduction to our first issue in 1991, Justice Ginsburg described our mission to

* Jenna Lauter was the *Journal's* Symposium & Special Projects Editor for 2020–21; Sarah Ortlip-Sommers served as Editor-in-Chief. Jenna and Sarah both graduated from Columbia Law School in 2021.

“portray today’s feminist movement, not as unitary, rigid or doctrinaire, but as a spacious home, with rooms enough to accommodate all who have the imagination and determination to work for the full realization of human potential.” The *Journal* strives to maintain that spacious home for today’s movement for gender equality—especially as it expands, improves, and evolves. It is with respect and gratitude that we continue our work, including this Symposium, in Justice Ginsburg’s indomitable spirit.

JENNA: In this year of her passing, we see both how far law and society have come and how far they have yet to go to ensure meaningful justice and equity for women and those who menstruate. Planning for this Symposium began more than a year ago, before the COVID-19 pandemic radically transformed our lives. The months since have thrown the persistent inequalities women—particularly women of color—face into sharp relief, as they have uniquely borne the burdens of work and childcare beneath the weight of unequal pay, discrimination, and gender-based violence. For example, of the 140,000 jobs lost from the U.S. economy in December 2020, one hundred percent of the net losses were by women of color. It is within this socioeconomic and political context that we consider the realities menstruators face in today’s society and how the law shapes—intentionally or through omission—the contours of their lived experiences. The fact that we are able to bill this event as the first-ever symposium to address menstruation and the law is signal enough of the inadequacy of attention to this subject, which directly affects half the world’s population for much of their lives and, one might well-argue, involves us all.

Yet, in recent years, as I’m sure many of you know, a movement for menstrual equity has taken root both in the United States and around the globe. The “tampon tax” has become part of the vernacular and is currently the subject of multistate litigation and legislative advocacy. Public awareness of the unfairness of the tax has inspired many people to start speaking and mobilizing about other menstrual obstacles, including the lack of employment-related accommodations for menstrual needs, the lack of access to safe and affordable products (particularly in schools and prisons), and the anxiety and harassment that menstruating students can face at school.

SARAH: As today’s and tomorrow’s speakers will showcase, the law and culture surrounding menstruation and menstrual equity implicate multifaceted, intersectional issues. We will hear from panelists representing legal academia, advocacy, public health, and activism on subjects ranging from cultural constructions of menstruation to courts and constitutionality, and from employment and capitalism to dignity for marginalized communities, as well as public policy and perspectives on change. We will

also feature many of the incredible authors who penned short essays that are already published online in the *CJGL Forum*. The *Journal* is proud to highlight work by more than forty authors, representing a diverse range of perspectives.

JENNA: We are excited to kick off what we are confident will be an informative and inspiring program. We are thrilled that Congresswoman Grace Meng, who represents New York’s Sixth Congressional District in the U.S. House of Representatives, will be joining us in a few hours to deliver a keynote address. And we are also honored to welcome celebrated author Judy Blume for a live Q&A later this afternoon. This year marks the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of Judy’s influential book *Are You There God? It’s Me, Margaret*, which provided an honest and relatable window into puberty for generations of readers.

SARAH: Before we turn things over to our first panelists, we’d like to take a moment to recognize and thank the three amazing women who first conceived of this Symposium and are the reason we are all here today: Professors Bridget Crawford and Emily Gold Waldman of the Elisabeth Haub School of Law at Pace University, and Professor Margaret Johnson of the University of Baltimore Law School. Bridget, Emily, and Margaret brought the idea for this program to the *Journal* last winter. As the incoming Editor-in-Chief at the time, one of the first questions I was asked was whether I was ready to take on a project like this. My answer, of course, was a resounding “yes,” although I didn’t know at the time that we would be doing all of the planning, and, indeed, this entire conference, while quarantined in our living rooms. I couldn’t have asked for a better team leader than Jenna to coordinate both the external communications side of things as well as our internal editing process. Thank you for everything. And working with Bridget, Emily, and Margaret over the past year, from the initial brainstorming stages, to reviewing the many insightful submissions we got last summer, to planning what has become this virtual program, in the middle of a global pandemic, has been one of the highlights of our 3L year.

We would also like to thank the entire staff of the *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law*. Putting together a Symposium issue of this magnitude—with twenty-four articles and nineteen essays—is not an easy feat during any year. So, I am especially grateful to our team for devoting so much time and effort and love to this project during the COVID-19 pandemic, when we have not been able to meet in person and many of us have dealt with personal and family struggles. I know many of you are here with us today, so I wanted to offer my heartfelt thanks for all you’ve done for the *Journal* and this Symposium over the past few months. We are especially grateful to our incoming

and outgoing board members who helped with the print issue and this virtual conference: Kate Yurkovsky, Lauren Varga, Brett Christensen, Hunter Carrell, Kate Kobriger, Rob Koehler, Rachel Rein, Rachel Seller, Nina Jaffe-Geffner and so many others. I wish I could name all of our staffers but you know who you are. Also, my predecessor as Editor-in-Chief, Christen Hammock, for first taking on the planning of this symposium. I know I speak for Jenna, as well, when I say that I feel so grateful and honored to be capping off my time in law school with this event, even though we can't be together in person.

JENNA: On that note, while we are disappointed we aren't able to hold an in-person Symposium, we have high hopes that this will be an engaging and interactive conference for panelists and attendees alike. To that end, we encourage you to submit questions and comments through Zoom's Q&A function (located at the bottom of your Zoom screen) throughout the Symposium. There will be time for Q&A after each panel and speaker, so please don't hesitate to chime in. We also invite you to follow along on Twitter, using the hashtag #AreYouThereLaw. Please note that this event is being recorded and will be available to view asynchronously after the conference. Please also remember to follow along with the schedule posted online so that you don't miss any of our panels or speakers. We will also post it in the chat right now, so it's accessible to all of you. Lastly, we hope you all join us tomorrow morning for even more discussion, as we look to the future of menstrual equity and where we can go from here. There will also be additional video remarks from Judy Blume, for those who miss her later today.

And now we are happy to pass things off to Professor Bridget Crawford, who will be moderating our first panel, "The Power of Cultural Constructions of Menstruation."

SATURDAY – CLOSING

JENNA: Thank you, panelists. I'm almost sad to say that this brings us to the end of the *Are You There Law? It's Me, Menstruation* Symposium. This has been such an enlightening, inspiring, and thought-provoking two days. We at the *Columbia Journal of Gender and Law* are so appreciative of the incredible work being done around the many facets of this topic—it gives us all hope for the future of menstrual equity and gender justice more broadly and lights a way for us future lawyers to continue to engage to move law and society forward.

SARAH: I would like to once again thank the incredible faculty conveners of this Symposium, without whom this event would never have happened. Professors Bridget

Crawford, Margaret Johnson, and Emily Waldman, it has been such a privilege to collaborate with you over the past year. Your vision immediately resonated with us at the *Journal* and clearly means so much to those who have participated in this event from all around the world. Thank you for catalyzing this conversation, which we hope will continue long into the future.

JENNA: To that point, we look forward to publishing the twenty-four articles you heard about over the course of this conference in our Volume 41 Symposium issue, so please be on the lookout for that announcement. We would love to stay engaged with you all on our social media platforms—@ColumbiaJGL on Twitter and @ColumbiaJournalGenderLaw on Facebook. We cannot thank you enough for your thoughtful questions and comments throughout this conference and hope this Symposium continues to fuel new partnerships and projects to further this important work.

SARAH: Thank you all for joining us. Have a wonderful weekend.