

# RIP RBG

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*Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg bid the world farewell last Friday as Jews around the world welcomed in the new year. The Notorious RBG is the second woman to serve on the Supreme Court and is the first woman and first Jew to lie in State in the United States Capitol. Standing barely five feet tall, we have lost a giant intellect and visionary champion for gender equality.*



[Photo Credit](#)

*What are some ways Justice Ginsburg impacted mental health?*

**1. RBG Supported Deinstitutionalization for Individuals with Mental Illness.** RBG wrote the majority opinion for *Olmstead v. L.C.* in 1999. The decision drew on Title II of the 1990 Americans with Disabilities Act. The plaintiffs, Lois Curtis and Elaine Wilson, were both admitted voluntarily to the psychiatric unit of a Georgia state hospital. Although at a certain point in their treatment they were medically cleared to move to a community-based setting, the transfer never happened. RBG wrote a passionate statement emphasizing the important right afforded to individuals with disabilities, including mental illnesses. She wrote that the “unjustified isolation” of Curtis and Wilson “perpetuates assumptions that persons so isolated are incapable or unworthy of participating in community life.” This landmark case secured the rights of people with mental disabilities, including mental illness, to live in their communities.

**2. RBG Supported Women’s Right to Equal Pay.** The case of *Ledbetter v. Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company*, decided in 2007, is perhaps RBG’s most famous dissenting opinion. Lilly Ledbetter sued Goodyear Tire & Rubber Company for gender discrimination after she discovered the company had been paying her less than her male counterparts. Although Ledbetter lost the Supreme Court case, RBG wrote a scathing dissenting opinion that she read from the bench in translated language so that everyone could understand the profound injustice. RBG’s passion for this issue ultimately led to the Lilly Ledbetter Fair Pay Act in 2009. We have [strong evidence](#) that gender pay disparities have significant negative impact on women’s mental health. A [study](#) conducted by Columbia University researchers, for example, shows that when women make less money than

their male counterparts (who are equally qualified for their jobs), they are more likely to experience depression and anxiety whereas closing the gender pay gap also closes the gap in mental health disparities.

**3. RBG Protected Women's Right to Choose.** RBG was among the five justices of the majority opinion in the 2016 Whole Woman's Health v. Hellerstedt case that struck down Texas's Omnibus Abortion Bill, which imposed strict restrictions and requirements on abortion providers. In her concurring opinion, she made it clear that the court wouldn't take kindly to further attacks on abortion providers. [The impact on mental health?](#) Experiencing unwanted pregnancies is strongly associated with poor mental health effects for women later in life. Women denied access to abortion are at risk for elevated anxiety, mood disorder, and lower life satisfaction and self-esteem as compared with women who receive an abortion. Also there is a strong relationship between unwanted pregnancy and interpersonal violence, which is obviously bad for mental health.

**4. RBG Defended Same-Sex Marriage.** The 2015 landmark case, Obergefell v. Hodges, granted same-sex couples the right to marry in all 50 states. RBG argued that "marriage was a relationship of a dominant male to a subordinate female that ended as a result of [the Supreme ] court's decision in 1982 when Louisiana's Head and Master Rule was struck down." She also derided the opposing argument that claimed same-sex couples did not have the capacity to procreate and therefore should not have the right to marry, asking whether a 70-year-old heterosexual couple would be allowed to marry when clearly they could not procreate. As an [advocate for LGBTQ rights](#), RBG was also a champion for mental health given the vast [evidence](#) connecting mental health and LGBTQ rights.

**5. RBG Served as a Role Model.** The Notorious RBG is legendary for her quiet, strategic and tireless efforts to achieve a more just world. In his [eulogy](#), Chief Justice John G. Roberts Jr. called RBG a "rock star." He recognized her service as a crusader for women's rights whose decisions over 27 years on the Supreme Court moved the nation closer to "equal justice under law." She was "Tough. Brave. A fighter. A winner.... But also: Thoughtful. Careful. Compassionate. Honest." There is substantial evidence documenting the positive impact of role models like RBG on a young person's psychological development and mental wellbeing. A recent [study](#) documents, for example, that young men without positive male role models are three times more likely than their peers to lack a sense of belonging and three times more likely to suffer from depression. When young women lack a positive female role model, they are more likely to have mood disturbances, including suicidal thoughts.

*Ruth Bader Ginsburg has left behind an extraordinary legacy and a mandate in both her jurisprudence and the way she made her way through life. Her work on gender equality yielded a multitude of benefits across society, including in the area of mental health. Civilization depends on the stewardship from one generation to the next of what matters most. May we remember. May we carry forward. May RBG RIP.*