

# Our Bodies Ourselves: 42 Years of Women's Health Education and Advocacy

## THE FIRST DECADE

*The publication of Our Bodies, Ourselves helps to launch the women's health movement in the United States.*

**1969** Twelve women meet during a women's liberation conference in Boston. At a workshop on "women and their bodies," they talk about their own experiences with doctors and share their knowledge about their bodies. The discussions at the conference are so provocative and fulfilling that the following summer, each woman researches a health topic close to her heart. They decide to put their knowledge into an accessible form that can be shared with others and that can serve as a model for women who want to learn about themselves, communicate their findings with doctors, and challenge the medical establishment to change and improve the care that women receive.

**1970** A 193-page course booklet on stapled newsprint entitled *Women and Their Bodies* is printed.

**1971** The authors change the name of the book to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, to emphasize women taking full ownership of our bodies. Republished by New England Free Press, the book puts women's health in a radically new political and social context and quickly becomes an underground success. It sells 250,000 copies, mainly by word-of-mouth.

**1972** The Boston Women's Health Book Collective formally incorporates.

**1973** Simon & Schuster publishes the first commercial edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

**1974** The Italian and Japanese editions are published.

**1975** A Danish edition is published.

**1976** A revised and updated version of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is published. A national bestseller, it is recognized by the American Library Association's Young Adult Service Division as one of the best books of the decade. In addition, a French edition is published.

**1977** The Boston Women's Health Book Collective self-publishes *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas*, the Spanish adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves*.

**1978** An English (British) edition is published.

**1979** An update of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is published and becomes a bestseller.

*Our Bodies, Ourselves* has stirred controversy since its inception. It has been banned by high [schools](#) and public libraries across the country. In the early 1980s, it was famously condemned by Jerry Falwell of the Moral Majority as "obscene trash."

## THE SECOND AND THIRD DECADES

*The success of Our Bodies, Ourselves necessitates a more formal organizational structure for The Boston Women's Health Book Collective. The group transitions away from a collective to a nonprofit organization.*

**1980** German and Swedish editions published.

**1981** Greek and Netherlands editions published.

**1982** An Israeli edition is published.

**1984** A revised version of the original, *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves*, is published.

**1991** A Telugu edition is published

**1992** *The New Our Bodies, Ourselves: Updated and Expanded for the 90s* is published.

**1995** A Russian edition is published.

**1996** South African (English) and Thai editions are published.

**1998** *Our Bodies, Ourselves for the New Century* is published. A Chinese edition is published. The Our Bodies Ourselves website is launched.

**1999** The first installment of BWHBC/Our Bodies Ourselves records are given to the Schlesinger Library for their collection on women's health.

## THE FOURTH AND FIFTH DECADES

**Women's groups from around the world continue to culturally adapt *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into print, digital, and social interactive formats. OBOS launches two single-topic books.**

**2000** A revised and culturally adapted edition of *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas* is published, produced with input from two dozen Latina organizations in the United States and Latin America.

**2001** Judy Norsigian, a founder of the collective, becomes executive director.

Three cultural adaptations of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* are published by our global partners: Armenian, by the Armenian Charitable Foundation on Population Development in Yerevan; Bulgarian, by the Women's Health Initiative in Bulgaria in Sofia; and Serbian, by the Autonomous Women's Center Against Sexual Violence in Belgrade.

**2002** Because most people associate the Boston Women's Health Book Collective with the book *Our Bodies, Ourselves*, the organization begins to do business under the name Our Bodies Ourselves. The legally incorporated name remains the same.

In Moldova, a Romanian adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is published by our partner, National Women's Studies and Informational Center.

The Our Bodies Ourselves Latina Health Initiative develops Promotoras de Salud, a peer health-educator training guide based on the *Nuestros Cuerpos, Nuestras Vidas*.

**2004** A Polish adaptation of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is published by our partner Network of East-West Women in Gdańsk, as is an inspired French edition for sub-Saharan Africa by Groupe de Recherche sur les Femmes et les Lois au Senegal. Our partner in India, Anveshi, reprints its Telegu edition into English to reach a wider audience in the country.

**2005** *Our Bodies, Ourselves: A New Edition for a New Era* is published and, months later, our partner in Korea, Alternative Culture Publishing, releases a Korean adaptation. The Tibetan Nuns Project, our partner in India, also publishes *Healthy Body, Healthy Mind*, with a foreword by the Dalai Lama.

**2006** Our Bodies Ourselves produces its first single-topic book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Menopause*. The organization also launches Our Bodies, Our Blog, a daily blog on women's health news and controversies. A reprint of the 2004 French inspired-edition (for French-speaking Africa) is released in Senegal and our partner in Albania, Gender Alliance for Development Center, publishes an Albanian adaptation. And finally, the OBOS Latina Health Initiative produces, along with Childbirth Connection, *De Camino a la Maternidad*, the Spanish language version of *Journey to Parenthood: Your Guide*

*Through Pregnancy, Birth & Beyond.*

**2007** The Tibetan Nuns Project publishes a back-translation in English of the Tibetan adaptation and our partner in Russia, Women's Health in St. Petersburg, publishes a Russian e-book for the region.

**2008** Our Bodies Ourselves produces its second single-topic book, *Our Bodies, Ourselves: Pregnancy and Birth*. Nepali booklets based on *Our Bodies, Ourselves* are published and used in nationwide self-care workshops by the Women's Rehabilitation Center, our partner in Nepal. In India, Women Unlimited publishes an adapted English text of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for distribution throughout South Asia.

**2009** Our partners Sanlaap, in India and Manavi, in the US collaborate and publish a Bengali booklet adapted from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* for India and Bangladesh.

**2010** Our partner in Armenia, "For Family and Health" Pan-Armenian Association publishes *Women's Voices for Health*, to inspire and empower Armenian women to become engaged in peer-advocacy for sustaining good health for themselves and their communities.

**2011** The ninth edition of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is published. Library Journal names it one of its Best Books 2011 in the consumer health category. The organization hosts a global symposium, "Our Bodies, Our Future: Advancing Health and Human Rights for Women and Girls" in celebration of its 40th anniversary. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* is recognized by TIME MAGAZINE as one of the best 100 nonfiction books since 1923.

Our partner in Israel, Women and Their Bodies, simultaneously launches Hebrew and Arabic adaptations of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* through a peace-building initiative of Jewish and Palestinian Israeli women. At year-end, Mavi Kalem, our partner in Turkey, releases *Bedenlerimiz Biziz* through a prestigious publisher planning nationwide distribution. Finally, our partners in Africa continue to use their content adapted from *Our Bodies, Ourselves* into Yoruba and Pidgin English (Nigeria) and Kiswahili (Tanzania) in innovative and interactive outreach efforts in the community.

**2012** "Our Bodies, Ourselves" is one of 88 books included in the 2012 Library of Congress exhibition "[Books that Shaped America](#)," a list of important works "intended to spark a national conversation on books written by Americans that have influenced our lives."

## Books:

Kathy Davis, *The Making of Our Bodies Ourselves: How Feminism Travels Across Borders*, N.C. Duke University Press, 2007

Susan Wells, *Our Bodies, Ourselves and the Work of Writing*, CA., Stanford University Press, 2010

## Contact Us

For more information about Our Bodies Ourselves (OBOS), please contact us at:

Our Bodies Ourselves  
5 Upland Road #3  
Cambridge, MA 02140  
[Phone: 617-245-0200](tel:617-245-0200)  
[Fax: 617-245-0201](tel:617-245-0201)

email: [office@bwhbc.org](mailto:office@bwhbc.org)

website: <http://www.ourbodiesourselves.org>

