

***Our Bodies, Ourselves* for a New Generation: Revising a Feminist Classic**

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*This series of three reports about *Our Bodies, Ourselves* (forthcoming May 2005) offers a behind-the-scenes look at the challenges of transforming a classic text of second-wave feminism—often called the bible of women’s health—to meet the needs and sensibilities of today. The first report explains the challenges encountered by the “tone and voice” editor as she edited for inclusive language, content, and tone, while also considering how race, class, age, ability, sexual orientation, and other concerns affect the text. The second report describes the new chapter on gender identity and sexual orientation, outlining the process and politics with which the author approached its creation. The third report describes the author’s efforts to meet an overall goal of the book—to broaden its appeal to a younger audience—and also to restructure the sexual anatomy section and address current “hot topics” such as menstrual suppression.*

Keywords: *Our Bodies, Ourselves* / women’s health / generations of feminism / tone and voice / inclusive language / diversity/ gender identity / sexual orientation / sexual anatomy

Our Bodies, Ourselves is often called the bible of women’s health. First published 35 years ago, this feminist classic has sold more than four million copies and has been translated into seventeen languages and Braille. Currently, groups in South Korea, India, Poland, and several other countries are working on translations and cultural adaptations.

Here in North America, I was invited to lead the revision of *Our Bodies, Ourselves* in the late summer of 2003. My selection as managing editor of the new English-language edition marked a conscious effort by *Our Bodies Ourselves* (the nonprofit group also known as the Boston Women’s Health Book Collective) to pass the proverbial torch to a younger generation. I was an infant back in 1969, when a group of women in Boston started the discussions that led to the original *Our Bodies, Ourselves*. Many of the women who have worked with me on this edition are even younger.

When I proposed a panel for the National Women’s Studies Association conference in 2004, I decided to ask how these younger women, working alongside women who have known and loved the book since its conception, have helped to transform this classic feminist text. Our aim has been to reach the next generation while retaining the essential strengths that make the book beloved by longtime fans. *Our Bodies, Ourselves* will continue to provide comprehensive, accurate health information from a

feminist, consumer-oriented perspective. But I wanted to reflect on what would be different in 2005 and how the new book would respond to today's technologies and sensibilities.

From my own vantage point, I could provide some answers. The new edition is the first to be launched along with a companion website, which offers more detailed and updated information and links; the book has a new look and feel; and it covers new topics and highlights the results of new research in women's health. But I wanted to hear from some of the younger women themselves about their roles in the revision process. I invited three of them—Zobeida Bonilla, the “tone and voice” editor for the entire book; Elizabeth Lindsey, who wrote a new chapter; and Marianne McPherson, who revised an existing chapter—to reflect on the differences they saw in this edition of the book and what it meant to them to participate in revising it. Their thoughts follow.

Heather Stephenson is a program manager at Our Bodies Ourselves, a nonprofit group also known as the Boston Women's Health Book Collective. She was the managing editor of the 2005 edition of Our Bodies, Ourselves and is now editing two more books, one on menopause and the other on childbirth. Correspondence can be sent to Heather Stephenson, Our Bodies Ourselves, 34 Plympton Street, Boston, MA 02118; heather@bwhbc.org.

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