



OUR BODIES OURSELVES TODAY AT SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY

Pregnancy and Reproductive Justice November 2024

A Note from Our Program Director

Dear Friends,

As feminists, we know that abortion law and policy have far-reaching effects. Abortion restrictions threaten our autonomy, our access to healthcare, and our very lives.

Earlier this year, Our Bodies Ourselves Today content expert [Dr. Rebekah Rollston wrote about needing to manage her ectopic pregnancy](#). "The processes for medication abortion and miscarriage management are exactly the same, and I was able to take mifepristone and misoprostol without anyone questioning my right to protect my own health."



The situation is increasingly different in many states. In Texas, [Porsha Ngumezi](#), [Josseli Barnica](#) and [Nevaeh Crain](#), have already died while seeking emergency care during their pregnancies. Texas state law threatens physicians with prison sentences for stopping a fetal heartbeat. Fearing for themselves, medical professionals are waiting for the confirmed death of the fetus before they will treat a pregnant woman with a potentially fatal infection of her own. The message is clear: where there are laws prohibiting abortion, we cannot count on getting health care for miscarriage and stillbirth, even when our lives are in danger.

Low-income women are also especially vulnerable to prosecution for crimes related to pregnancy, [pregnancy loss](#), or birth. In documenting the ongoing criminalization of pregnancy, the non-profit [Pregnancy Justice](#) (formerly National Advocates for Pregnant Women) has found that an overwhelming majority of the cases involve not abortion but a live birth.

The concept of reproductive justice underlines such intersections. That's why [Our Bodies Ourselves Today makes reproductive justice central to our perspective](#). Reproductive Justice, as defined by [SisterSong](#), is the human right to maintain personal bodily autonomy, have children, not have children, and parent the children we have in safe and sustainable communities. The concept of reproductive justice is thus intimately connected to [birth justice](#) and pregnancy justice as well.

This November newsletter explores many interconnections between pregnancy and other aspects of women's health. Two of our content experts talk about their work: Mickey Sperlich on how trauma affects birth and parenting experiences, and full-spectrum doula Sabia Wade on providing both birth and end-of-life support. One of our new resources examines how Black midwives can help ease the continuing crisis in maternal mortality. You'll also read about upcoming events, a new Our Bodies Ourselves Today podcast, how to get involved in birth justice, and the public service award just bestowed on OBOS founder Judy Norsigian.

There is much to do but we are not alone.

Onward!

Laura

Donate to Our Bodies Ourselves Today for Giving Tuesday!

Who We Are: Q&A



Mickey Sperlich, Pregnancy & Birth Expert Panel Chair, Our Bodies Ourselves Today

We recently spoke to Mickey Sperlich, an experienced midwife and researcher who is an associate professor at the University of Buffalo School of Social Work. Mickey studies how trauma and mental health challenges affect reproduction and parenting. She joined Our Bodies Ourselves Today as a content expert last year, and now chairs the Pregnancy & Birth panel.

What brought you to Our Bodies Ourselves Today?

I first encountered the OBOS book in the 70s when I was studying to be a midwife. I appreciated its egalitarian approach to co-creating knowledge and loved how it was all about empowering women. Later, OBOS was part of my midwifery lending library and a resource I directed clients to often. So the chance to be part of its continuation is a real honor.

What's a crucial issue related to pregnancy and/or birth that we need to understand better?

My research has been about understanding the effects of trauma and posttraumatic stress (PTSD) and other related challenges on a person's experience of birth and early parenting. A crucial issue we need to understand is that both prior and current traumas, like abuse and interpersonal violence, together with social determinants of health (e.g., poverty and racism) are critical factors driving poor outcomes for parents and infants alike. Due to the frequency of healthcare seeking during

pregnancy, it is an opportune time to provide trauma-informed and trauma- and pregnancy-specific resources and supports; yet, these are not yet widely available.

What gives you hope?

When I began researching the effects of trauma on childbearing, no one was talking about trauma-informed care, the Adverse Childhood Experiences study (Felitti et al., 1998) had not been done (demonstrating the lifelong effects of childhood trauma on health), and we also did not understand the extent to which women struggle with PTSD (at about twice the rate as men). It was frustrating and bleak to see the state of things and the extent to which these issues were not being addressed. But now, although outcomes are still quite dire, and disparities are stark, at least we are having these conversations. We know the problem and where we need to go. So, although I still get frustrated that progress is slow, I can see that shift of awareness in my lifetime, and that gives me real hope.

[□ More about Mickey Sperlich](#)



Stories & Conversations: Author, educator, and doula Sabia Wade

In this clip from her interview with Our Bodies Ourselves Today's **Jonese Austin**, pregnancy and birth content expert **Sabia Wade** discusses being a full spectrum doula and its personal resonances, from birth work to end-of-life work.

[□ Listen to the story](#)

Our Resources

Lessons from Black Midwives

The maternal mortality rate in the U.S. is double that of other high-income nations, and it continues to increase. The dangers for BIPOC mothers and infants are even more acute, with Black mothers three to four times more likely to die while giving birth or in the year afterwards than white mothers.

In this article, six Black midwives share their insights, experience, and proposed solutions.

Nikia Grayson was evaluating a public health program in Memphis when she noticed there were no Black midwives in the community. "I started doing a lot of research about midwifery and Black midwifery specifically. I realized they were run out by politics and policy, and racism. I wanted to see a reclamation and restoration of Black midwifery in our community. So that's what made me decide to go back to school to become a nurse



and then a midwife."

[□ Read the full article](#)

News and Events



Judy Norsigian Receives Robert Coles Award

The Phillips Brooks House Association at Harvard University named Our Bodies Ourselves founder Judy Norsigian the recipient of the Robert Coles "Call of Service" Award for 2024. Massachusetts State Senator Elizabeth "Liz" Miranda, Our Bodies Ourselves Board president Diana Namumbejja Abwoye, Harvard dean Alta Mauro, and PBHA president Cody A. Vasquez all praised Norsigian for a lifetime of public service and social advocacy.

"This is a moment when being in community with others who share our values can be healing, inspiring, and fortifying," Judy noted in her acceptance speech. "It's not always easy, but finding good allies along the way can make a huge difference. . . One of the reasons Our Bodies, Ourselves had such staying power over the past 55 years was because the founders, as well as the staff and board members who joined the organization along the way, recognize the value of such collaborations and collective effort."

[□ Read Judy's acceptance speech](#)

Image: Judy Norsigian, Diana Namumbejja Abwoye (President of the Our Bodies Ourselves Board), and Carline Desire (Executive Director of the Association of Haitian Women) at the Robert Coles Award reception

NEXT CHAPTERS: An Our Bodies Ourselves Today Podcast about Growing Older

We don't talk openly enough or often enough about what it feels like to grow older, especially as women. How our sexuality, our bodies, and our relationships change later in life. How

ageism makes everyday necessities like housing, work, and health care more challenging. How growing older intersects with other forms of discrimination — and community — for BIPOC women and LGBTQIA+ women.

Sharing our experiences is essential to busting the myths that surround aging. Hosted by award-winning podcaster, sociologist, and OBOS Today content expert Chair Mindy Fried, NEXT CHAPTERS will bring us the frank conversations we need — with diverse experts, activists, and everyday people, *and* a feminist perspective, just as Our Bodies Ourselves always has. Each episode's dynamic stories reveal the real joys and struggles of growing older, as we journey through the ever-changing social, economic, and political landscape.



□ [Learn more and support Next Chapters here](#)

□ Upcoming Events □

SEX & AGING
An Our Bodies Ourselves Conversation

Heather Corinna **Judy Norsigian** **Aida Manduley**

Tuesday Dec 10th 5-7:30pm EST
Modern Theatre - Suffolk University
or join on Zoom

OUR BODIES OURSELVES TODAY
AT SUFFOLK UNIVERSITY
ourbodiesourselves.org

Ford Hall Forum
at Suffolk University

RSVP for your ticket

Author, educator, and activist **Heather Corinna** is hosting a frank and lively conversation with Our Bodies Ourselves founder **Judy Norsigian**, and organizer and trauma-informed therapist **Aida Manduley**, about sex, sexuality, and getting older.

- What do we, as women and gender-expansive people, expect from sex as we age?
- What are the myths and realities around seniors and sex?
- How do ageism and sexism shape people's experiences and ideas about sex and aging?
- What part does ableism play in these attitudes and preconceptions?

5pm-6pm ET – Reception (in person)

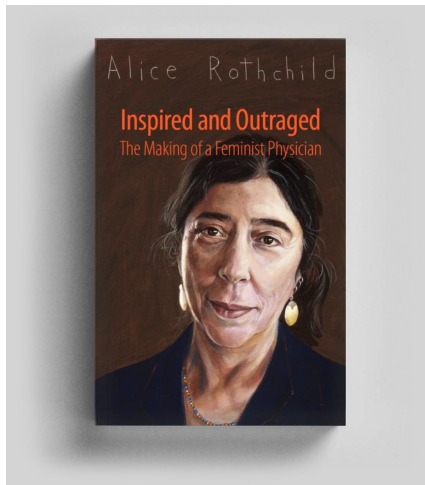
6pm-7:30pm ET – Panel discussion, followed by audience Q&A

Join us in person ~or~ remotely (Zoom webinar)

Please note: masks required as a cold/flu precaution for this part of the program

□ [RSVP FOR TICKETS and learn more](#)

Hosted in partnership with Suffolk University's [Ford Hall Forum](#).



Save the Date: February 19th, 2025

At 6pm on February 19, Alice Rothchild will be speaking at Suffolk University about her intimate memoir, "**Inspired and Outraged**" and the experiences that contributed to her passion and power as a doctor, an activist, and a woman. Compiling stories of her life in verse, Rothchild explores the events of her childhood, her training as an obstetrician-gynecologist, and her discovery of feminism as a guiding force in her life.

Recommend a book to us!

Organizing for Change

Activism for Birth Justice

Every Mother Counts (EMC) works to improve access to maternity care

around the world by partnering with organizations that serve historically marginalized communities. They provide grants, training for birth care workers, medical equipment, and other resources that are culturally relevant to the respective community. They also focus on raising awareness through storytelling, filmmaking and data research. Volunteers can organize fundraising campaigns and events, advocate for policy changes, run races and marathons to bring awareness, and participate in email writing campaigns.



□ [How to get involved](#)

Please share this newsletter with a friend!

**Your accurate *and* inclusive
guide to health, sexuality, *and*
reproductive justice**



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