

January 2024 Newsletter: Sexual Anatomy

A Note from Our Executive Director

Dear Friends,

Our Bodies, Ourselves. We've heard the famous phrase so many times, it's easy to forget how radical it still is. For women and gender-expansive people, the liberation of our bodies is a necessary condition of living full, sovereign lives. Understanding our sexual bodies—their complex contours and near-constant changes—is key. And it's exactly this intimate knowledge that old and new patriarchal forces want to deprive us of. How can there be so many people who work hard every day to take away our ability to live in peace and power?



Befriending our bodies, getting to know what's normal for us, challenging our limitations, learning and celebrating our pleasure, resting well, fighting for our rights. All of these are about the centrality of our bodies to ourselves. This month's newsletter, which focuses on sexual anatomy, offers 2 cervix-related resources, in honor of Cervix Health Awareness Month. One is on the venerable practice of pelvic self-exam, the other is an introduction to the Cervix Gallery. You will meet one of our Sexuality content experts and read the reflections of a woman who was born without a vagina. You will find [the new Moroccan adaptation of "Our Bodies, Ourselves,"](#) read a feminist art blog post about violence in Israel/Palestine, and learn more about SisterLove, Inc., a fantastic reproductive justice organization. Our Bodies Ourselves Today is proud to offer this newsletter to ring in the new year, and grateful to be with you as we learn to call our bodies—and our lives—by their true names.

Onward!
Amy

Explore Our Resources



Self Exam: The Cervix Close-Up

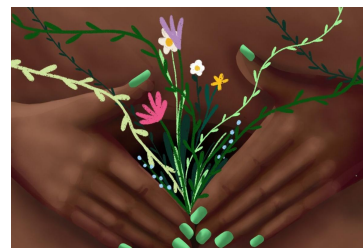
The pelvic self-exam has been a mainstay of "Our Bodies, Ourselves" from the beginning. Women in the 1970s found it transformative to take back the speculum and examine their own genitals, rejecting the alienation and fear of facing what's actually "down

there." This resource is still one of the most visited pages on Our Bodies Ourselves Today. Observing the color, size, and shape of our cervixes and the changes in our vaginal and cervical fluids during the different stages of our menstrual cycles allows us to learn what is normal *for us* and can help us recognize when something is wrong. We can do a pelvic self-exam just once to check things out, or repeat it regularly during certain phases of our menstrual cycle, during perimenopause, and post-menopausally. Even if you read this long ago, you may be surprised how well it stands the test of time!

[Learn to do a cervical self-exam!](#)

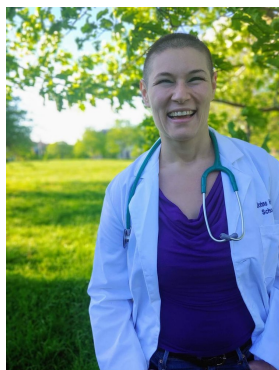
Beautiful Cervix Project

The Beautiful Cervix Project allows us to admire the beauty in a little-appreciated part of our bodies. Explore the cervix galleries to see how cervixes change in response to factors such as menstruation, pregnancy, and birth control, and conditions such as yeast infections and bacterial vaginosis. Or just marvel at the diverse beauty of all things cervix. There is also information about reproductive anatomy and advice for purchasing a cervical self-exam kit.



[View the Galleries of Cervixes and Learn More](#)

Meet Our Content Experts



Bianca Palmisano, Sexuality expert

My name is Bianca Palmisano (they/them), and I have the pleasure of being a content expert for Our Bodies Ourselves Today. It's a dream come true to have contributed edits to a classic "Our Bodies, Ourselves" article, "[Self Self Exam: The Cervix Close-Up: The Cervix Close-Up.](#)" This work feels like a natural extension of my clinical practice as a nurse, where I treat STIs, counsel patients on birth control, and perform speculum exams to look for injury after an assault.

In an ideal world, healthcare, sexual education, and ethics are natural partners. I'm excited to be part of Our Bodies Ourselves Today because it brings together these domains in a similar way to my consulting with [Intimate Health Consulting Health Consulting.](#) As a consultant, I offer training to other healthcare professionals on how to ethically practice sexual medicine: how to talk about sex in non-stigmatizing ways, how to treat LGBTQIA+, sex worker, and disabled patients with respect and competence, and how to address trauma in medical exams. Medical education teaches us how to treat the body, but the work of learning to live in one is lifelong, and Our Bodies Ourselves Today can help with that.

[Learn More about Learn More about Bianca](#)

A Personal Story about MRKH

The Missing Vagina Monologue

Esther Morris shares her experience as a woman who was born without a vagina and learned about Mayer-Rokitansky-Kuster-Hauser Syndrome (MRKH). Those born with MRKH have an underdeveloped vagina, fallopian tubes, cervix and/or uterus. Morris endured medical and sexual trauma until she learned her diagnosis for herself and was empowered to make choices around her body. She was further affirmed when she found a supportive community of other women with MRKH. Morris asserts that she is not defined by her body parts and being "different is not wrong." She invites us to challenge our notions of what it means to be a "normal" woman. Morris (now Morris Leidolf) published her memoir, *Not Uncommon, Just Unheard Of: From Union Carpenter to Gender Activist*, in 2023.

[Read This Read This Story](#)

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News and Updates



"Mon Corps, Mon Choix": New Moroccan Adaptation of "Our Bodies, Ourselves"

Collectif Assiouar, a grassroots feminist organization in Rabat, Morocco, runs workshops for women in genital anatomy, physiology, feminist self defense and menopause. In these workshops, the women also use art to explore their lives and express their needs. In 2017, the Collectif began translating and adapting the chapters on these topics from "Our Bodies, Ourselves" into French and Arabic. The booklet was published in spring 2023 and is now available on our site.

[Read "Mon Corps, Mon Choix"](#)

Organizing for Change

Advocating for Reproductive Justice

Sister Love, Inc. is a sexual and reproductive health and justice organization dedicated to the health and



wellness of Black women, femmes, and gender nonconforming persons. They provide preventative education to address HIV and other STIs, conduct research to promote health equity, and advocate for youth and women affected by HIV/AIDS and other forms of reproductive oppression. Dázon Dixon Diallo, Founder and President of SisterLove, Inc., is also an Our Bodies Ourselves Today sexuality content

expert.

[Read more about SisterSong, Inc.](#)

"Blessed are the Peacemakers, Joyful are the Climate Leaders"

"The mixed-media work below...started out as a meditation on bicycle wheels and became a ruptured mandala--an expression of longing for the cycle of violence to end, and a prayer evoking the spirit of the **Shechinah**, the Divine Feminine, as a source of wisdom and healing..."



Read more from Jewish feminist and artist Elena Stone on violence in Israel/Palestine, feminist art, and climate change. Elena Stone is Artist-in-Residence at Suffolk's Center for Women's Health and Human Rights. "Blessed are the Peacemakers" is one piece of her project with the Center, "Big Planet Love: A Blog About Art, Ecofeminism, and Being Human in the Earth Community."

[Read more here](#)

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