

SPECIAL CELEBRITY EDITION: DR. RUTH K. WESTHEIMER

THE DAILY PHALLUS

EDITOR: JACOB BUTLETT

5 NOVEMBER 2014

MEET THE SEX-PERT: DR. RUTH

When Ruth K. Westheimer was young, she fled from Germany during World War II to avoid the Nazis. Many years later, she began to teach people about the power of sex.

After coming to America in 1956, Westheimer earned her Masters in Sociology from the Graduate Faculty of the New School of Social Research. Then she received a Doctorate of Education (Ed.D.) in the Interdisciplinary Study of the Family from Columbia University Teacher's College in 1970. In her quest to educate others about sex, she turned to radio and TV shows before hosting a show of her own, *The Dr. Ruth Show* ("All About Dr.



TOP: Dr. Ruth poses in front of a board game inspired by her work (http://www.masslive.com/living/index.ssf/2012/07/post_134.html).

Ruth").

Dr. Ruth instructs nonchalantly while maintaining an air of professionalism. Thus, people of all ages can appreciate her teachings.

"Every generation believes that it's the first one to have discovered the pleasures of sex, and yet none of us would be here if it weren't for the sex lives of the previous generation," Westheimer and Pierre say in *Sex for Dummies*. "Even if it's too much to imagine your parents and grandparents having sex, just give 'em a tip of the old hat" (12).

"HELLO, THIS DR. RUTH WESTHEIMER. YOU'RE ON THE AIR."
—DR. RUTH

(QTD. IN MELODY AND PETERSON 208).

CONTENTS

- Gallery of Dr. Ruth
- Sex & Pleasure: Part I—Friends with No Strings Attached
- A Great Release (Relief?): Masturbation
- Deviant or Different? Homosexuals
- Sex & Pleasure: Part II—Love
- A Word From the Editor

THE AIM OF THIS EDITION

M.E. Melody and Linda M. Peterson's *Teaching America about Sex: Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals from the Late Victorians to Dr. Ruth* has a clear goal: "to track America's sexual zeitgeist through the marital/sexual advice literature over the decades from the 1880s to the new

millennium" (3).

This edition of *The Daily Phallus* explores the last key contributor of sexuality from *Teaching America*—Dr. Ruth.

The views of this famous sex therapist reflect a modern understanding on sexu-

ality. With her fluid, down-to-earth prose, she teaches readers about the growth society has undergone in terms of its norms. Through her advice literature, readers can view the norms governing American life during the 1990s and early 2000s. In fact, most, if not all, of

her views are still followed today.

In sum—

As time changes, so does society's understanding of sexuality.

SEX & PLEASURE: PART I— FRIENDS WITH NO STRINGS ATTACHED



ABOVE:
A couple in each
other's arms (image
provided by
Microsoft Publisher).

The films *Friends with Benefits* and *No Strings Attached* debuted in 2011. As their names suggest, they feature friends who engage in casual sexual intercourse without love.

As expressed by the students in History of U.S. Sexuality, causal intercourse among friends, friendly acquaintances, and even strangers is widely condoned.

Dr. Ruth and Lehu address

these individuals. They acknowledge that “people these days engage in sex with people who are just friends, sharing ‘benefits.’ If that happens once, then perhaps that’s as far as it will go. But if two friends are having sex with some regularity, the odds are pretty good that at least one of them will want to be more than just friends” (20).

“IT IS AS IF THE
PENIS HAS A LIFE
OF ITS OWN
AND CAN HEAR
THE NICE
THINGS BEING
SAID ABOUT IT.”
—DR. RUTH

(QTD. IN
MELODY AND
PETERSON 219).

A GREAT RELEASE (REFLIEF?): MASTURBATION

The opinions surrounding masturbation have been changing for centuries. Although morality plays a role in whether masturbation is seen as either healthful or detrimental, the effects of masturbation on one’s health have been evaluated time and again.

Christian reform physiologist Sylvester Graham entered the early 1800s concerned with the impact of Onanism, or masturbation, on one’s sanity. (Onanism is derived from Biblical history, in which Onan dropped his sperm outside his sister-in-law.)

Graham says, “The mental action, and the power of the imagination on the genital organs, forcing a vital stimulation of the parts, which is reflected over the whole nervous system, are exceedingly intense and inju-

ries” (72).

As a result, Graham believes that masturbation leads to the destruction of the human body: masturbation, in particular, dements the brain and poisons the indigestion system.

Modern experts, including Dr. Ruth, refute this proposition.

In her *Encyclopedia of Sex*, Westheimer affirms, “A natural expression of human sexuality, masturbation may begin in childhood and continue into old age—or it may not” (“Masturbation” 174).

The key words in this modern view are “natural expression of human sexuality.” Ergo, masturbation, in the eyes of Dr. Ruth, should be performed; it, in opposition of Graham, fails to effect insanity.



ABOVE: A nerve
(image provided by
Microsoft Publisher).
Graham believes that
overstimulated nerves
cause insanity.

“To some degree, an orgasm is an orgasm is an orgasm,” Westheimer and Pierre write in *Sex for Dummies*. “Masturbation does bring relief from sexual tension... [and] there’s no doubt that masturbation can be better than nothing” (20).

Moreover, according to modern research, those who experience “regular orgasms seem to have less stress and enjoy lower rates of heart disease, breast cancer, prostate cancer, and endometrioses” (Roach 218).



The concepts of heterosexuality and of homosexuality were first invented almost one hundred years ago. Since then, their denotations and their connotations have evolved throughout the perpetual reconstruction and growth of America's norms and expectations.

The dichotomous relationship between heterosexuality and homosexuality in America, in effect, created an "in-group" and "out-group" mentality, in which heterosexuals were considered normal and homosexuals were labeled deviant.

As a result, homophobia, or

DEVIANT OR DIFFERENT? HOMOSEXUALS

the fear of homosexuals, entered the forefront to protect America's norms.

M.E Melody and Linda M. Peterson accuse Dr. Ruth of homophobia in her 1995 edition of *Sex for Dummies*.

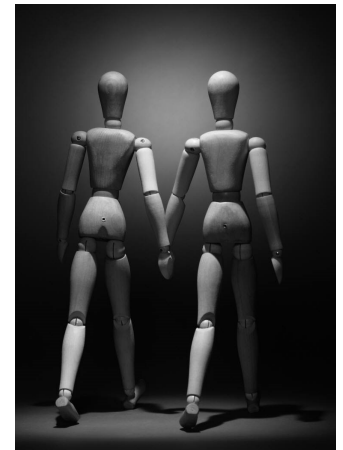
"Dr. Ruth neglects to mention that 165 countries and cities and 11 states prohibit discrimination based on sexual orientation," Melody and Peterson say. "She fails to note domestic partnerships laws as well as the fact that many companies, now including Disney, recognize such relationships. She subtly suggests remaining in the closet" (232).*

Although Dr. Ruth's earlier work may suggest homophobic ignorance, her *Encyclopedia of Sex* contends this accusation. The text under the term *Homosexuality* reads:

"Since it is possible to change popular cultural attitudes through education, leadership, behavior, and the law, and since the preponderance of evidence to be sexually attracted to their own sex, it appears to be very much in society's best interest to develop healthier attitudes toward homosexuality. Such attitudes would decrease violence towards sexual minority persons, diminish their need to hide feelings and relationships, lower the numbers of sexual partners and sexual transmission of diseases, and reduce the depression and suicide that may result from confusion over sexual identity, lack of self-respect, and feelings of isolation. Negative social attitudes hurt not only homosexuals but all of society" (140).

Editor's Note:

*These facts may be antiquated, for *Teaching America about Sex* was published back in 1999.



UPPER LEFT & ABOVE: Art figures holding hands (images provided by Microsoft Publisher).

BOTTOM: Dr. Ruth poses for a picture (<http://www.biography.com/people/dr-ruth-westheimer-9542073>).

SEX & PLEASURE: PART II—LOVE

Among her many teachings, Dr. Ruth also talks about sex in relationships, a common phenomenon in 2014.

She and Lehu say, "One more thing about sexual intercourse and its pleasures: As great a feeling as you get when having an orgasm during sexual intercourse, I think that most couples will tell you that they got even more pleasure from

the intercourse they had while trying to make a baby" (16).

Love may play a role in enhancing a couple's pleasure—that perhaps a "part of the glue that holds love together is sex, and so the more you know about sex, the greater success you'll have in love" (Westheimer

and Lehu 20).

Other experts have theorized about love. More notably, Robert Sternberg says that love comprises three elements: intimacy, passion, and commitment. Gary F. Kelly summarize Sternberg's theory:

Intimacy: "involves closeness,

mutual support, and sharing" (227)

Passion: "It is manifested in a desire to be united with the loved one, leading to sexual desire arousal and sharing" (227)

Commitment: "represents the cognitive side of love, in both its short- and long-term sense" (227)

A WORD FROM THE EDITOR



ABOVE: Editor Jacob R. Butlett (image found in personal records)

“I WANT PEOPLE TO BE
SEXUALLY ACTIVE
UNTIL THE AGE OF
99.”
—DR. RUTH

(QTD. “DR. RUTH
WESTHEIMER” *BIO*).

Dr. Ruth symbolizes the modern human need to explore the “sexual unknown.”

“As a sex therapist,” she says in the introduction of her *Encyclopedia of Sex*, “I have an obligation to help people avoid the dangerous effects of sexual illiteracy, for example unwanted pregnancies and the spread of sexually transmitted diseases, especially that dreadful killer, AIDS” (6).

She teaches not only facts, but practicality.

In *Sex for Dummies* Westheimer and Lehu say, “Believe it or not, in at least one recorded case, the man had a vasectomy, the woman had her tubes tied, and she still became pregnant. So remember, *the only method that works 100 percent of the time is abstinence*” (13).

Dr. Ruth and I share similar values: in general, we believe in the

importance of individual sexual identity—that every one should be given the choice to explore his or her sexuality safely.

Globally, approximately 33 million persons are infected with HIV, and about 3 million new persons are diagnosed with HIV every year (Kelly 451).

Dr. Ruth and I believe in ways to protect people from contracting HIV: besides abstinence, we also understand that safe sex can decrease the probability of getting HIV.

In short, Dr. Ruth and I acknowledge the diverse, intricate nature of sexuality. Once educated, people can start to look at the world differently. The world consists of many people with different sexual values. Dr. Ruth doesn’t preach about one of them, but many of them. In other words, she grants her readers the opportunity to be more open-minded—a trait all learners ought to possess.

Works Cited

- “All about Dr. Ruth.” Dr. Ruth.com. N.d. Web. 1 November 2014.
- “An Act for the Suppression of Trade in and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use.” *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*. Ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 157-159. Print.
- “Dr. Ruth.” *masslive.com*. Web. 1 Nov. 2014.
- Graham, Sylvester. “On Self-Pollution.” *Attitudes toward Sex in Antebellum America: A Brief History with Documents*. Ed. Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin’s, 2006. 72-74. Print.
- “Homosexuality.” *Encyclopedia of Sex*. Ed. Ruth K. Westheimer. New York: Continuum, 2000. Print.
- Introduction. *Encyclopedia of Sex*. Ed. Ruth K. Westheimer. New York: Continuum, 2000. 5-6. Print.
- Kelly, Gary F. *Sexuality Today*. 10th ed. New York: McGraw-Hill, 2011. Print.
- “Masturbation.” *Encyclopedia of Sex*. Ed. Ruth K. Westheimer. New York: Continuum, 2000. Print.
- Melody, M.E, and Linda M. Peterson. *Teaching American about Sex: Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals form the Late Victorians to Dr. Ruth*. New York: New York UP, 1999. Print.
- Roach, Mary. *Bonk: The Curious Coupling of Science and Sex*. New York: W.W. Norton, 2008. Print.
- Westheimer, Ruth K., and Pierre Lehu. *Sex for Dummies*. 3rd ed. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2006. 11-22. Print.



Readings for Further Research

- Drew, Pinsky. "Ask Dr. Ruth About Sex." Dr. Drew (n.d.): Newspaper Source Plus. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.
- Durand, V. Mark, and David H. Barlow. *Essentials of Abnormal Psychology*. 6th ed. Belmont, CA: Wadsworth, 2013. 330-369. Print.
- Fussman, Cal. "Ruth Westheimer." *Esquire* 155.1 (2011): 77. Corporate ResourceNet. Web. 30 Oct. 2014.
- Westheimer, Ruth K. *Dr. Ruth's Guide to Good Sex*. New York: Warner, 1983. Print.
- . *Dr. Ruth's Sex After 50: Revving Up the Romance, Passion & Excitement!* Fresno, CA: Quill Driver, 2005. Print.
- , Amos Grunebaum, and Pierre Lehu. *Sexually Speaking: What Every Woman Needs to Know about Sexual Health*. Hoboken, NJ: Wiley, 2012. Print.
- , and Pierre Lehu. *Dr. Ruth's Guide for the Alzheimer's Caregiver: How to Care for Your Loved One Without Getting Overwhelmed... and Without Doing It All Yourself*. Fresno, CA: Quill Driver, 2012. Print.
- , and Pierre Lehu. *Dr. Ruth's Top Ten Secrets for Great Sex: How to Enjoy it, Share it, and Love it Each and Every Time*. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 2009. Print.

*ABOVE: A yellow book (image provided by
Microsoft Publisher)*