



Teaching America About Sex: Marriage Guides and Sex Manuals from the Late Victorians to Dr. Ruth

M. E. Melody, Linda M. Peterson

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In this witty and provocative study of sex and marriage manuals, M.E. Melody and Linda M. Peterson reveal that permissiveness, prohibition, and, tellingly, persuasion and enforcement—from sermons and hellfire to mutilation and electroshock—have informed popular sex education over the past hundred and twenty years.

From the late Victorian obsession with masturbation and hygiene, to the "if it feels good, do it" ethos of *The Joy of Sex*, America's disposition to sex has evolved from a general squeamishness to a veritable cult of mutual orgasm. But despite the recent emphasis on "voluptuous pleasure," the basic power dynamic underlying the discourse on sex has been remarkably resistant to change. The authors reveal that, even as sexual behavior changed during periods of upheaval, the prescriptive literature on sex has remained traditional at its core, promoting sex within marriage for the purpose of reproduction.

A cross-generational account of the major constructions of masculinity and femininity from 1880 to the present day, **Teaching America About Sex** serves up a lucid and entertaining reading of the twentieth century's vexed relationship with sex.

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