

Dr. Ruth hits the college lecture circuit

By Kathy Parrish
staff writer

Dr. Ruth Westheimer welcomes everyone to her talks on sex. Everyone that is except her hubby, Fred. "I don't let my husband come to my lectures," the popular "sexologist" told 1,200 Oakland University students. "He would sit in the back and raise

his hand and say: 'Don't listen to her. It's all talk.'"

Whether firsthand — or gathered from the sexual data she quotes — the explicit advice Dr. Ruth gives out weekly during her radio program "Sexually Speaking" and TV show "Good Sex" is in big demand. The best-selling "Dr. Ruth's Guide to Good Sex" is being translated into six

languages and her new young people's book, "First Love," is doing well. During two days in the Detroit area, she filled a auditorium with her lectures. "The ratings are so-o-o fantastically high," said Westheimer, who has listeners in 80 major markets. "It's not because of my expertise. It's because there is a need. If there wasn't, I'd be off the air tomorrow."

IN A DARK print dress and sturdy brown heels, petite Dr. Ruth looks like anybody's grandmother. In fact, the New York Times calls the mother of a 28-year-old daughter and 22-year-old college son "Grandma Freud."

But most grandmas just don't dish out the same kind of advice she does. Dedicated to wiping out "sexual ignorance," she speaks freely about subjects such as orgasm, premature ejaculation, masturbation and contraception.

"I'm willing to speak explicitly because human sexuality has to be taught that way," explained Westheimer, who has a Ph.D. from Columbia University. She fills her presentations with humor. Arriving late for her talk Monday because of a rainstorm, she remarked on the dark skies outside. "I thought maybe somebody up there doesn't want me to talk about the penis and vagina," she told the delighted audience.

WHILE DEDICATED to ridding people of hang-ups, she also reminds listeners that sexuality is just one part of a relationship. "Not for one minute do I believe sex is everything in a relationship," explained Westheimer, stressing the importance of love, sharing and children. If there's one point the controversial speaker is a bit boring on, it's the importance of contraception.

But Dr. Ruth doesn't intend to let down for a moment on what she considers to be the important issue she deals with. "It's a strange country that can put a man on the moon but can't assure contraception," she says. "I think every sexually active woman should carry a condom in her pocketbook," said Westheimer, who deliberately got pregnant before marrying the second of her three husbands. "They come in all colors and can be matched to a pocketbook."

WHILE URGING women to protect themselves from unwanted pregnancies, she really sees that responsibility as a two-way street. She urges both parties to take precautions in sexual situations.

"I believe two responsible people who do not want to become parents should share the responsibility for contraception. Then we will have accomplished something."

While supporting the right of a woman to have an abortion, she does not see it as a contraceptive device. "Before the laws were changed, only women with money could afford abortions. The rest resorted to back alley abortions and coat hangers," she told the student audience. "It would be a step backward to do away with abortions. They must remain legal."

DEBUNKING SEXUAL myths is one of the greatest joys for Dr. Ruth, who relies heavily on data obtained by sex experts like Masters and Johnson and her teacher, Dr. Helen Singer Kaplan. "Loud and clear from the OU rooftops. There's no such thing as a vaginal versus a clitoral orgasm," said Westheimer, who describes orgasm as "a reflex — it's like a sneeze."

"But hear me clearly. Not every sneeze is an orgasm." Because she refuses to advocate something not supported by data, she's raised the ire of some. The therapist who stresses over and over that she is not a medical doctor — stands unconvinced that there is a "G" spot in the vagina, that an orgasm can last 30 minutes, and that a new English film-like substance and the sponge are good contraceptives.

"The sponge people send me very nasty letters," said Westheimer, who is concerned that the product might lead to toxic shock syndrome. "Even if the danger is only one woman in 100,000 it's still dangerous," she told her youthful audience. "That one could be my daughter, friend or someone close to me."

THE ONLY CHILD of a German Jewish couple killed at Auschwitz, the former Karola Ruth Siegel spent her adolescence in Switzerland. After a stint in an Israeli kibbutz, the high school drop-out studied psychology at the Sorbonne, the University of Paris.

While happy there, it was a real struggle financially. So it was particularly rewarding for Westheimer to return to France this year as a movie star. "The movie had nothing to do with sex with me," quipped Dr. Ruth, who portrays a rich woman who runs a foundation in the upcoming "One Woman or Two."

"When I studied in Paris I was very poor and sometimes only ate twice a day," said Westheimer, who seems to

be enjoying the limousines and free clothes that come with success. "And it was fun to see the college where I once flunked as a freshman," she told her delighted student listeners.

DURING A QUESTION and answer period with the audience, she talked about individual concerns. Using just first names, the questioners asked general questions credited to a "friend." Lightheartedly, she answered one woman's question about her boyfriend

falling asleep during sex. "I hope you're not going to marry him," she quipped, turning to the crowd. "Some men insist on sleeping on the couch. I'm saying loud and clear that's a very bad habit. And it shows sexual ignorance."

Then she zeroed in on the student, asking a question of her own. "I have to ask you a question, otherwise I will leave this campus and be worried," she asked in a grandmotherly way. "Do you use contraception?"

Aging program offered

"The Art of Growing Older and Myths of Aging," a free program for the public, will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday, Dec. 5, in Grace Hospital, 18700 Meyers Road south of Seven Mile, Detroit.

Featured speakers for the program are: Dr. Elizabeth Arnold, director of geriatrics at Grace Hospital and an instructor at Wayne State University

School of Medicine, and Diane Leub, clinical nurse specialist, division of gerontology at Harper-Grace Hospital.

Free parking is available in a lighted and monitored parking lot next to the hospital.

For more information or to pre-register, call 494-8983.

Stagecrafters produce Dickens' Christmas tale

"A Christmas Carol: Scrooge and Marley" will be produced at the Stagecrafters Baldwin Theatre, 415 S. Lafayette, Royal Oak, weekends through Dec. 14. Curtain time is 8 p.m. Fridays and Saturdays and 7 p.m. Sundays.

The play is Israel Horowitz's adaptation of Charles Dickens' Christmas tale.

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Tickets are \$6. Tickets for seniors and students are \$5 for Sunday performances only.

Tickets can be reserved by calling the box office, 441-6430.



DAVID FRANK/staff photographer

Dr. Ruth Westheimer, who's made serious talk about sex a late night radio and cable television staple, is about to branch out into film, taking on a part turned down by Linda Hunt.

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