
*Overview:* Carolyn Herbst Lewis’ short book *Prescription For Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era* examines the ways family doctors saw themselves as responsible for the preservation of American values concerning sex and sexuality. Physicians believed that maintenance of healthy sex lives in American couples was crucial to maintaining a happy marriage and family. The happy marriages and families doctors sought to preserve were considered fundamental to a secure nation.

According to Lewis, American values were thought to be at risk during the Cold War era. The social anxiety of the era prompted doctors to become heavily involved in sexual health of their patients. Not only were physicians in the Cold War Era involved in their patient’s intimate lives, but also their work unwittingly constructed a set of social categories that served to define normative sexual behavior. The habits physicians deemed healthy included heterosexual relationships, male-dominated sexual relationships, procreative sex and sex only within the context of marriage. To engage in sexual activity outside of normative categories was considered unhealthy and deviant. Sexual deviance was considered a threat to American culture. Subsequently, doctors positioned themselves as guardians of the morality of the country- warriors in the fight against the erosion of American family values.

Lewis fully explores issues surrounding artificial insemination, femininity, masculinity, premarital pelvic exams and the growing involvement of physicians in American’s sex lives during The Cold War period. Lewis’s exploration of how specific “deviant” sexual practices were perceived as threatening to the stability of the family is
quite involved. However her discussion on the broader consequences that familial instability had on American security during The Cold War is brief. Lewis attempts to relate this concept to each section of her book but only succeeds in doing so on several occasions. She is successful, however, in providing the reader with a great deal of historical background. She is able to communicate the social implications of a doctor’s involvement in their patient’s sex lives. Lewis also conveys the implications that new medical developments concerning sexual health had on American society during The Cold War era (although not the implications on the stability of the nation overall).

*How this can be applied to American Studies:* While *Prescription for Heterosexuality*, may not fully answer questions concerning the wider implications of changing sexual habits on the security and stability of The United States, it does provide a sound historical context on the subject matter addressed. Lewis successfully assembles fascinating arguments through the examination of a variety of primary and secondary sources including scientific journals, census reports, magazines articles, government legislation, the Kinsey reports (and reactions to them) and statistical information.

The book is centered upon the growing role of physicians in the lives of American citizens as well as the ways in which doctors positions themselves as guardians of American values and protectors of the stability of the nuclear family. *Prescriptions for Heterosexuality* would be a good addition to AMS 248: Narratives of Illness. Lewis’ work contributes to the AMS 248 syllabus by providing historical background of the emergence of the family doctor as a vital participant in the overall health of the family. The book explains how medical advances and research led to a fierce debate over moral dilemmas. Lewis attempts to place these developments in a Cold War context. In this
regard, *Prescription for Heterosexuality* can be considered a valuable text in understanding what role sexual health has played in the history of our country. Rarely, do historians explore the sexual history of America, especially in the meticulously researched and engaging way that Carolyn Herbst Lewis does in *Prescription for Heterosexuality: Sexual Citizenship in the Cold War Era.*