Collection Summary

Title: Dr. Ruth Westheimer Papers
Bulk Dates: 1982-1986
ID No.: MSS86577
Creator: Westheimer, Ruth K. (Ruth Karola), 1928-2024
Extent: 17,325 items
Extent: 50 containers
Extent: 19.8 linear feet
Language: Collection material in English
Location: Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
LC Catalog record: https://lccn.loc.gov/mm2023086577
Summary: Sex therapist, talk show host, author, and educator. Correspondence, publicity packets, and show notes related to Westheimer's radio and television shows in the 1980s. Primarily letters from Westheimer's audience relating their questions and concerns to the talk show therapist.

Acquisition Information

The papers of Ruth Westheimer were given to the Library of Congress by Westheimer in 2023.

Processing History

The papers of Ruth Westheimer were arranged and described by Katherine S. Madison with the assistance of Miles Lawlor and Kimberly Owens in 2023-2024. During processing, original listener letters that met certain criteria were removed to a "Closed" series; redacted copies remain in the open portion of the collection. Redacted information includes only names, addresses, phone numbers, and other personally identifiable information.

Transfers

Audiotapes have been transferred to the National Audio-Visual Conservation Center (NA VCC) where they are identified as part of the Dr. Ruth Westheimer Papers. Patrons are encouraged to contact NA VCC in advance of a research visit.

Copyright Status

Copyright in the unpublished writings of Ruth Westheimer in these papers and in other collections of papers in the custody of the Library of Congress has been dedicated to the public.

Access and Restrictions

Restrictions apply governing the use, photoduplication, or publication of items in this collection. Consult reference staff in the Manuscript Division for information concerning these restrictions. In addition, many collections are stored off-site and advance notice is needed to retrieve these items for research use.

Preferred Citation

Researchers wishing to cite this collection should include the following information: Container number, Dr. Ruth Westheimer Papers, Manuscript Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.
Biographical Note

Date    Event
1928, June 4  Born Karola Ruth Siegel in Wiesenfeld (Karlstadt am Main), Germany
1939  Sent to Heiden, Switzerland, on a Kindertransport
1945  Immigrated to British Mandate Palestine
1948  Served with the Haganah in the Arab-Israeli War
1950  Married first husband (divorced circa 1955)
      Moved to France
1952-1956  Studied psychology at the Université de Paris (Sorbonne)
1956  Immigrated to the United States
1957  Married second husband (divorced circa 1958)
      Birth of daughter Miriam Westheimer
1959  M.A., sociology, New School for Social Research, New York, N.Y.
1961  Married Manfred Westheimer (died 1997)
1963  Birth of son Joel Westheimer
1965  Naturalized as U.S. citizen
1970  Ed.D., family-life studies, Teachers College of Columbia University, New York, N.Y.
circa 1977  Certificate, psychosexual therapy, Cornell University Medical College (under Helen Singer Kaplan)
1980-1990  Host, Sexually Speaking, WYNY-FM (NBC) Radio
1983  Published Dr. Ruth's Guide to Good Sex. New York: Warner Books
1984-1991  Host, Good Sex! with Dr. Ruth Westheimer and other related programs, Lifetime Television Network
      Released Dr. Ruth's Game of Good Sex. Victory Games
      Released Terrific Sex: The Dr. Ruth Video. Warner Video
1986  Premiere of "Ask Dr. Ruth" newspaper advice column
1987  Published All in a Lifetime. New York: Warner Books (re-released 2001)
2024, July 12  Died, New York, N.Y.

Scope and Content Note

The papers of Ruth Westheimer span the years 1977-1990, with the bulk of the material dating from 1982 to 1986. The papers document the early career of Westheimer as a radio and television talk show host under the moniker "Dr. Ruth." The collection is organized into three series: Listener Letters, Sexually Speaking Production Files, and Closed.

Westheimer began her public career as a media personality and talk show sex therapist with the New York City NBC-affiliate WYNY-FM in 1980. Her radio talk show, Sexually Speaking, was nationally syndicated by NBC Radio in 1984. Westheimer's television show, Good Sex! with Dr. Ruth Westheimer, premiered on the Lifetime Television Network in 1984. The collection documents this early media career largely through the lens of letters sent from listeners and viewers of her various programs and talk show appearances, as well as via select production files from NBC Radio and WYNY.

The collection's series are listed and briefly described below. A fuller description of each series and a list of its contents can be accessed in the series descriptions within the container list.

The Listener Letters series contains letters sent to Dr. Ruth Westheimer in the 1980s, largely from listeners of her syndicated WYNY-FM (NBC) radio show Sexually Speaking and viewers of her Lifetime Television talk show Good Sex! with Dr. Ruth Westheimer.

The Sexually Speaking Production Files document several behind-the-scenes aspects of Westheimer’s WYNY-FM (NBC) radio show and media career, largely focused on the period 1982-1985.
The remaining series contains Closed material.

**Arrangement of the Collection**

This collection is arranged in three series:

- Sexually Speaking Production Files, 1977-1990
- Closed, 1980-1987

**Selected Search Terms**

The following terms have been used to index the description of this collection in the LC Catalog. They are grouped by name of person or organization, by subject or location, and by occupation and listed alphabetically.

**People**

**Subjects**
Adultery.
Contraception.
Dr. Ruth's Game of Good Sex (Game)
Female orgasm.
Gender identity.
Human anatomy.
Interpersonal relations.
Male orgasm.
Radio talk shows--United States.
Sex instruction.
Sex.
Sexual health.
Sexual orientation.
Television talk shows--United States.

**Titles**
Good Sex! with Dr. Ruth Westheimer (Television talk show)
Ruth K. Westheimer papers.
Sexually Speaking (Radio program)

**Occupations**
Authors.
Educators.
Talk show hosts.
Therapists.
Description of Series

**Container**  
**Series**  
**BOX 1-37**  
**Listener Letters, 1980-1987**

The Listener Letters series contains letters sent to Dr. Ruth Westheimer in the 1980s, largely from listeners of her syndicated WYNY-FM (NBC) radio show *Sexually Speaking* and viewers of her Lifetime Television talk show *Good Sex! with Dr. Ruth Westheimer*. Additional letters in this series were sent in by readers of her first book, *Dr. Ruth's Guide to Good Sex* (New York: Warner Books, 1983) and in response to her many appearances on television talk shows such as the *Tonight Show Starring Johnny Carson*, *Late Night with David Letterman*, and the *Phil Donahue Show*. Several 1982 letters were sent in to the television studios of WNYW/Channel 5 in New York City, where Westheimer briefly hosted a local daytime talk show.

The majority of the letter writers requested advice from Westheimer in her role as a sex therapist and media personality; some letters convey complaints and others request autographs, photographs, or memorabilia. Common topics include contraceptive use, male and female orgasm and anatomy, sexual health, sexual orientation/identity, infidelity, and relationship problems. Early letters, from 1981 to 1984, typically include a brief summary of their central question on the envelope or on a sticky note, likely written by WYNY staff. Beginning in mid-1986, most letters received were compiled into numbered envelopes accompanied by an index containing a summary and, if known, the age, sex, marital status, and location (by state) of the letter writer.

The series is divided into two parts: "letters received," which contains letters mailed to Westheimer, and "letters with responses," which contains letters mailed to Westheimer plus her reply to the letter writer. Copies of various unpersonalized form letters returned to letter writers (circa 1982 and circa 1986) can be found in the *Sexually Speaking* Production Files series.

Arranged chronologically, in two parts. A span of "letters received" in 1986-1987 were indexed into numbered folders, and that arrangement is maintained.

**BOX 37-38**  
**Sexually Speaking Production Files, 1977-1990**

The *Sexually Speaking* Production Files document several behind-the-scenes aspects of Westheimer's WYNY-FM (NBC) radio show and her media career, largely focused on the period 1982-1985. Prominent in the series are weekly show notes from *Sexually Speaking* producers (1982-1983) as well as promotional material from both WYNY and NBC Radio Entertainment. Also included are audience questions collected during an April 1982 appearance on *Late Night with David Letterman* on NBC Television. A few folders of material relate to other aspects of Westheimer's media career in the 1980s, including promotional material for her 1985 board game, *Dr. Ruth's Game of Good Sex*.

Material types include press releases and publicity packets, show notes and schedules, memoranda and letters, and forms.

Arranged alphabetically by subject or type of material.

**BOX X 39-X 50**  
**Closed, 1980-1987**

Material types include correspondence.

Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were separated.
# Container List

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Container</th>
<th>Contents</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1-37</td>
<td>Listener Letters, 1980-1987</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 1</td>
<td>Letters received</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 2</td>
<td>circa 1981-circa 1982</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 4</td>
<td>1982, Mar.-1982, June</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 8</td>
<td>1984, Feb.-1984, Sept.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>BOX 10</td>
<td>1984, Oct.-1985, Jan. (14 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 11</td>
<td>1985, Feb.-1985, June (14 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 12</td>
<td>1985, June-1985, Aug. (13 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 14</td>
<td>1985, Dec.-1986, Feb. (15 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 15</td>
<td>1986, Mar.-1986, May (13 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 16</td>
<td>1986, May-1986, Aug. (12 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 18</td>
<td>1986, Oct.-1986, Nov. (9 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 19</td>
<td>1986, Nov. (9 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 20</td>
<td>1986, Dec.-1987, Jan. (9 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 21</td>
<td>1987, Jan. (9 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 22</td>
<td>1987, Jan.-1987, Feb. (9 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 23</td>
<td>1987, Jan.-1987, Feb. (8 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 24</td>
<td>1987, Jan.-1987, Feb. (8 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 25</td>
<td>1987, Feb.-1987, Mar. (8 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 26</td>
<td>1987, Feb.-1987, Mar. (8 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 27</td>
<td>Undated (4 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 27</td>
<td>Letters with responses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 27</td>
<td>1982, Apr.-1982, May (7 folders)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BOX 30</td>
<td>1983, Mar.-1983, June (13 folders)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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<tr>
<td>BOX 38</td>
<td>WYNY special weekend programming listener survey report, undated</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
| BOX X 39-X 50 | **Closed, 1980-1987**  
  Material types include correspondence.  
  Arranged and described according to the series, containers, and folders from which the items were separated.  
  Listener Letters, letters received  
  BOX X 39 1980-1982, May  
  (14 folders)  
  BOX X 40 1982, June-1984, July  
  (22 folders)  
  BOX X 41 1984, Aug.-1985, June  
  (12 folders)  
  BOX X 42 1985, July-1986, May  
  (12 folders)  
  (38 folders)  
  BOX X 44 1987, Jan.-1987, Mar.  
  (37 folders)  
  BOX X 45 1987, Feb.-1987, Apr.  
  (12 folders)  
  BOX X 45 Undated  
  Listener Letters, letters with responses  
  (6 folders)  
  (9 folders)  
  (8 folders)  
  (9 folders)  
  BOX X 49 1984, Feb.-1984, Apr.  
  (7 folders)  
  (4 folders)  
  BOX X 50 circa 1984 |