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# Sexual Autonomy and the Status of Women: Models of Female Sexuality in U.S. Sex Manuals from 1950 to 1980

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**Abstract**

Sex and marriage manuals contain sexual scripts about female sexuality and the role of women in heterosexual relationships. As attitudes change, new scripts become marketable; and as manuals articulate new scripts, they legitimate a redefinition of women's sexuality and roles. This paper looks at 49 manuals published in the United States from 1950 to 1980. These manuals generally reflect one of three distinct models of female sexuality: different-and-unequal, humanistic sexuality, or sexual autonomy. Each model rests on a different set of assumptions and values, and each has social and political implications. The popularity of the sexual autonomy model since 1975 is particularly noteworthy and provides a basis for potentially radical revisions in notions of women's sexuality.

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