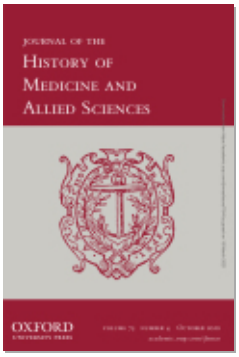
The Case Against the Doctors: Gender, Authority, and Critical Science Writing in the 1960s



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The Case Against the Doctors: Gender, Authority, and Critical Science Writing in the 1960s

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ABSTRACT

In the 1960s, widespread popular-cultural deference to the authority of science and medicine in the United States began to wane as a generation of journalists and activists reevaluated and criticized researchers and physicians. This article uses the career of feminist journalist Barbara Seaman to show the role that the emerging genre of critical science writing played in this broader cultural shift. First writing from her position as a mother, then as the wife of a physician, and finally as a credentialed science writer, Seaman advanced through distinct categories of journalistic authority throughout the 1960s. An investigation of Seaman's early years in the profession also vividly demonstrates the roles that gender and professional expertise played in both constricting and permitting new forms of critique during this era.

KEYWORDS: journalism, health activism, gender, women's health, birth control pill

In 1975, feminist health activist Barbara Seaman responded to an invitation she received in the mail from the editors of *Who's Who in America*, the reference guide to important cultural figures that she often consulted while researching her articles and books.[1] Feeling contemplative about the direction of her career in journalism fifteen years in, Seaman took her time filling out a form titled "Thoughts On My Life," designed for *Who's Who* participants to share "those principles, ideas, goals, and standards of conduct that have helped you achieve your present success." Identifying herself

1 *Who's Who* correspondence, Carton 1, Box 7, Barbara Seaman Papers, 1920-1983, 82-M33—84-M82, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. Hereafter, "Barbara Seaman Papers" refers to this original collection, distinct from the "Barbara Seaman Additional Papers" part of the collection donated later and cited elsewhere.

as a "science reporter" in a draft response, Seaman described her first decade in the business as one of dawning realization: "I slowly came to recognize," she wrote, "that many of the most brilliant men whose work I was covering, men whom I continue to respect for their genius and dedication were (perhaps unconsciously) confusing science and politics, or science and morality." [2]

These great men of science, Seaman continued, were in need of serious checking by responsible journalist-watchdogs working on behalf of the public interest. Otherwise, she warned, "When such people confuse science and politics they can do a great deal of harm." Alan Guttmacher, in her words "a great gynecologist," had been premature in his assurances that the birth control pill was safe and therefore endangered countless women's lives. Bruno Bettelheim, the influential psychiatrist, had "let his work be used in such a way" that mothers came to be wrongly blamed for their children's mental illnesses. Once such men "get into positions of exceptional power," she continued, their misguided alliances with politics could pose serious threats. It was her job to "use some of my reporting skills to help expose them."[3]

Barbara Seaman is remembered decades later as one of the most vocal critics of physicians—particularly of gynecologists—in the late twentieth-century United States. Throughout the 1970s, she was at the forefront of the women's health movement, publicly advocating for changes in women's health care and boosting other feminist challengers of the medical establishment.[4] In 1975, the year Seaman responded to *Who's Who*, she also co-founded the National Women's Health Network, a lobbying organization in Washington, D.C. She is perhaps best known for her 1969 exposé *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, which inspired the 1970 Congressional hearings on birth control pill side effects that led to the FDA's decision to mandate a patient package insert disclosing potential harms of the drug.[5] Rather than focusing on the more famous episode, however, this article instead uses Seaman's early career in journalism as a window into both the growth of critical science writing as a genre and the broad shifts in popular perceptions of medical authority in the 1960s. By emphasizing journalistic method and practice, I show science writing in action, following a young freelancer through the early stages of her career.[6]

2 "Thoughts On My Life" drafts, 26 February 1975 and three undated, Carton 1, Box 7, Barbara Seaman Papers.

3 Ibid.

4 Kelly O'Donnell, "Our Doctors, Ourselves: Barbara Seaman and Popular Health Feminism in the 1970s," *Bulletin of the History of Medicine* 93 (2019): 550-576. For other accounts of the women's health movement, see for example Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge: Sexuality, Reproduction, and Women's Health in the Second Wave* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010) and Jennifer Nelson, *More Than Medicine: A History of the Feminist Women's Health Movement* (New York: New York University Press, 2015).

5 For the standard account of this story, see Elizabeth Siegel Watkins, *On the Pill: A Social History of Oral Contraceptives, 1950-1970* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998).

6 Here I am borrowing Bruno Latour's phrasing to make the point that much like scientists themselves, we also need to more critically analyze the back room processes of science's cultural interpreters. Bruno Latour, *Science in Action: How to Follow Scientists and Engineers Through Society* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1987).

As Seaman recognized, over time her style of journalism had shifted from the mostly indiscriminate consumption and boosterism that defined most pre-1970s writing about science and medicine to the bold reproach that characterized later critiques.[7] In cultivating her own authority to speak on behalf of science and medicine, Seaman moved from popularizer to critic to advocate for radical change. Historians have characterized the 1960s as the beginning of the end of the so-called "golden age" of American medicine. According to this interpretation, deference to the profession's cultural authority (inflated by postwar developments in vaccines and disease eradication), gave way to skepticism and outright distrust heading into the 1970s.[8] I showcase one strand of that broader trend: the rise of M.D.-skeptical science writing. Prior to more familiar benchmarks such as Ivan Illich's *Medical Nemesis* or HealthPAC's *American Health Empire*, writers such as Seaman were steadily wresting authorial control from physicians in order to voice their opinions of medicine.[9]

Journalism and other mass media accounts critical of medicine certainly existed before the 1960s. Here, however, I focus on the 1960s as a critical time in this genre, which more directly laid the foundation for later conversations around patients' rights and the widespread lay criticism of the medical establishment that dominated the 1970s and after.[10] To show this development, I look in particular at the changing sources of Seaman's authority to speak on medical matters. There were three distinct roles that Seaman played in roughly chronological order, each affording her a different mode of expertise. In the earliest part of the decade, Seaman was enabled and constrained by her primary identity as a mother, writing on medical subjects through the lens of child-rearing. Seaman then adopted the role of doctor's delegate, co-authoring articles with her psychiatrist husband and ghostwriting for a psychologist. While this brought her more publishing opportunities, her lack of credentials impeded her success as a solo author. Finally, Seaman attained a new journalistic authority via her formal training as a science writer—a relatively new brand of expertise, allowing non-physicians and non-scientists to comment on the state of science and medicine with esteem and impunity. Seaman did not become a physician or scientist herself; she became a professional critic

7 For discussions of the media's role in this transformation, see: John C. Burnham, *How Superstition Won and Science Lost: Popularizing Science and Health in the United States* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987); Bert Hansen, *Picturing Medical Progress from Pasteur to Polio: A History of Mass Media Images and Popular Attitudes in America* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009); Susan Reverby, *Examining Tuskegee: The Infamous Syphilis Experiment and Its Legacy* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009) and Naomi Rogers, *Polio Wars: Sister Kenny and the Golden Age of American Medicine* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

8 Historians of medicine have argued that this period represented a time of crisis for the cultural authority of physicians. For a discussion of this context as it relates specifically to oral contraceptives, see Elizabeth Watkins, *On the Pill*. See also David Rothman, *Strangers at the Bedside: A History of How Law and Bioethics Transformed Medical Decision Making* (New York: Basic Books, 1991).

9 Barbara Ehrenreich (with John Ehrenreich and Health PAC), *The American Health Empire: Power, Profits, and Politics* (New York: Random House, 1971); Ivan Illich, *Medical Nemesis: The Expropriation of Health* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1975).

10 For a much longer (though less journalism-centric) account of patient and consumer skepticism towards medicine, see Nancy Tomes, *Remaking the American Patient: How Madison Avenue and Modern Medicine Turned Patients into Consumers* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016).

of their institutions. During the 1960s, as this case study of her transformation shows, the type of more open conversation among lay writers—particularly women—about the ugly, often sexist, side of medicine was made possible.

MOTHER. . . MAY I?

In the early 1960s, to combat the loneliness of her experience as a busy physician's wife and the mother of three small children, Barbara Seaman turned to writing.[11] Living first on Long Island and then settling into an apartment on the Upper West Side of Manhattan, her appointments with local New York psychoanalysts had not been entirely sufficient to "straighten [her] out" emotionally.[12] Between naps and feedings, Seaman slowly developed a diverse writing portfolio. She took comfort in writing; after all, she had been a "passionate student of Yeats" at Oberlin College, focusing on the writer's life and works in her undergraduate research.[13] Returning to poetry, she composed several verses and song lyrics, including a lullaby. She tried her hand at prose, writing a short story about modern romance. She also wrote a number of non-fiction pieces, inspired by her experiences with childrearing.[14] This was ultimately the direction where she focused most of her energy.

Non-fiction was also the genre where she found the most publishing success. In 1960, choosing to breastfeed for the second time, she sold an article based on her own experiences with the practice. *Mother's Manual*, a magazine often found in obstetrician's offices, paid her $50 for a personally inspired piece.[15] Advertised as "a guide to raising happy, healthy babies," the magazine targeted a range of women of childbearing age, organizing individual issues by the stages of pregnancy and early child development. With the exception of Seaman and two other laywomen writers, the majority of articles were written by MDs and RNs. The magazine published Seaman's piece as "Will You Breast Feed?" Referencing and agreeing with pediatrician Benjamin Spock on the benefits of nursing, Seaman proclaimed, "The profound physical pleasure of letting down milk—of emptying the full breasts by filling the baby's empty tummy is

11 Seaman's *Feminine Mystique*-like experience during this period was related to journalist Marcia Cohen during a 1980s interview for her book on the history of the women's movement. See Marcia Cohen interview with Barbara Seaman, October 1982, folder "Barbara Seaman," pages 7 and 41, Marcia Cohen Papers, 1967-1985, 92-M135, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA.

12 Barbara Seaman, "The Changing Lives of (Some) Doctors' Wives," ca. 1974 article draft, Box 33, Folder 8, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers, 1933-2008, MC 695, Schlesinger Library, Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA. I will refer to this collection, having a separate finding aid, as "Barbara Seaman Additional Papers."

13 "Biographer's Qualifications," undated draft, Carton 4, folder 158, Barbara Seaman Papers.

14 Carolyn Willyoung Stagg to Barbara Seaman, 21 November 1961, Box 35, Folder 20, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

15 Barbara Seaman, "Pregnancy and Birthing," in *Voices of the Women's Health Movement*, Vol. 1, ed. Barbara Seaman and Laura Eldridge (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2012), 189; Trisha Gura, "Opening Eyes: Oberlin Alumni Take on Estrogen - and the Drug Industry That Sells It," *Oberlin Alumni Magazine* 99, no. 4, spring 2004, accessible at http://www.oberlin.edu/alummag/spring2004/feat_eyes.html; Amy Bloom and Ellen Parsons, "The 25th Anniversary of the Doctors' Case Against the Pill," *Network News* Nov/Dec 1994, accessible at http://nwhn.org/25th_anniversary.

exquisite." The act, she explained, engenders self-confidence in women and provides a bonding experience between mother and child.[16] The article was grounded in her personal experience, relating many anecdotes to convey her points to readers.

Yet while Seaman was advocating breastfeeding, medical experts at the time for the most part were not. *Mother's Manual*, replete with advertisements for Gerber's baby foods and Carnation evaporated milk, placed Seaman's article in direct opposition to one by another mother who endorsed bottle-feeding instead. Following Seaman on the next page, Dorothy Weaver's ". . .Or Bottle Feed?" reassured readers that "bottle feeding, too, can be a satisfactory reassuring experience." Plus it was far more modern and convenient. As for the bonding advantages of breastfeeding, "lots of old-fashioned cuddling" could be just as intimate.[17] As Seaman hinted in her article, American culture had come to view bottle-feeding as the preferable, more modern option. The editors made sure to clarify what medical experts thought about this matter, introducing the pair of articles with a short blurb by the Chief of the New York City Department of Health's Maternity & Newborn Division of the Bureau of Child Health, Jean Parker, M.D., PhD. Parker briefly summarized the current medical opinion, stating that while mother's milk was preferable in theory, babies thrived on formula as well. She also stressed that Seaman and Weaver's contrasting articles were not meant to be taken as medical advice about infant health. Instead, the articles were about the experiences of the "mama." "In the following article," she concluded, "you will read about one mother's personal experience. Mrs. Seaman, graduate of Oberlin College and the wife of a psychiatrist tells of the many advantages she has gained from breast feeding her infants." Although *Mother's Manual* presented Seaman's "mama's" perspective, it was sure to include an official medical take on the infant's health by an MD with clear pediatric authority.[18]

Seaman was less successful in selling some of her other pieces. She wrote an article on mental illness and submitted it to *Ingenue*, a magazine for teenage girls. Although the editor felt that her work had "a great deal of merit," she rejected the piece. The "subject of mental illness" was not something that she thought the magazine could "handle" at that time. It may have been true that in the early 1960s, an article on mental illness would have been deemed unsuitable for publication in a teenager girl's magazine. It is also possible that the editor may have considered Seaman unqualified to write on the subject and was subtly guiding her towards more suitable topics. She did encourage Seaman to submit any other pieces she might have "dealing with the emotional, social, family, etc. problems that teen-agers have to face."[19] The former was a closed-off, clinical subject, whereas the latter was a more appropriate, domestic formulation of similar themes.

That Seaman's lack of medical authority hindered her publishing opportunities was made clear in November 1961, when a literary agent at the Lester Lewis Associates

16 Barbara Seaman, "Will You Breast Feed?" *Mother's Manual* 9 (1962): 28-29, 76.

17 Dorothy Weaver, ". . .Or Bottle Feed?" *Mother's Manual* 9 (1962): 30.

18 Preface to Barbara Seaman, "Will You Breast Feed?"

19 Sylvie Schuman to Barbara Seaman, 26 April 1962, Box 35, Folder 20, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

Agency politely declined her representation. She had written to an established female agent, offering her portfolio and seeking advice on publishing in magazines. The agent remarked that while her attached published piece was interesting, she had never even heard of *Mother's Manual*, and that fifty dollars seemed like a very small amount to receive for it. She implied that Seaman was lucky to have it accepted for publication in the first place. "Without a medical degree," she commented, "it might have been difficult for you to sell it to one of the larger circulation magazines." The truth was, based on her experience in the publishing world, that "most medical authorities now appearing in periodicals are written by authorities in the given field." Since Seaman's article was written from a personal experience angle, she mused, it was acceptable. She noted that her similar pieces, "What It Is Like to Raise a Family" and "I'm Glad My Children Were Celiacs," had the necessary "emotional and controversial angle" for potential sales.[20] In other words, Seaman as a non-physician could write about health-related topics, so long as she relied on her maternal authority and spoke from personal experience. Otherwise, writing for the public on health matters was to be reserved for physicians.

These medical and scientific topics, however, were precisely the issues that Seaman wanted to pursue. She continued researching and proposing articles—particularly those relating to psychology and mental health, topics she was familiar with due to both her personal experiences with psychoanalysis and her husband's career. Seaman stayed up-to-date with the latest developments in the field. She pitched three articles to an editor at the *Ladies' Home Journal*: one with the title, "Is Cancer Psychosomatic?" (the answer was, in part, yes), another focusing on the psychological effects of sterilization on men and women, and one heavily psychoanalytic piece arguing that contraceptive failure was largely a result of women's unconscious desires to conceive.[21] Yet despite her efforts, Seaman had relatively little success in publishing articles of her own. After her breakthrough with *Mother's Manual* in 1960, Seaman would publish in magazines only three more times as a solo author during the following decade. In the early and mid-1960s, as made explicit to her by the literary agent's rejection letter and implicit elsewhere, she was constrained by her lack of authority to write on the topics she most wanted to discuss. To establish herself as an author, Seaman would have to rely on the authority of others.

THE PSYCHIATRIST'S LITTLE HELPER

Seaman was far from the only person in the early 1960s seeking to publish her thoughts on matters of health, and in particular psychology. Psychology and psychiatry were in vogue in postwar American culture. In newspapers and magazines, physician and psychologist experts spoke directly to wide audiences and dispensed advice.[22] One such author was Joyce Brothers, a psychology PhD who never practiced clinically, but

20 Carolyn Willyoung Stagg to Barbara Seaman, 21 November 1961, Box 35, Folder 20, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

21 Barbara Seaman to Peter Wyden, 1 October 1965, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

22 For discussions of psychiatry and postwar American culture, see Andrea Tone, *The Age of Anxiety: A History of America's Turbulent Affair with Tranquilizers* (New York: Basic Books, 2008); Jonathan Engel, *American Therapy: The Rise of Psychotherapy in the United States* (New York: Gotham, 2008); Rebecca Jo

became a celebrity mental health expert. She rose to fame in the late 1950s, appearing on the *$64,000 Question* quiz show and soon securing her own pioneering talk radio show about psychology. She also published books and advice columns, the most famous and enduring of which was her monthly column in *Good Housekeeping*, "Ask Dr. Joyce Brothers," beginning in 1963.[23] Readers, typically women, wrote in seeking advice and deferring to Brothers's expert wisdom. Popular and prolific, Dr. Brothers churned out columns, brochures, and talk show appearances at a steady clip. She described herself as a "translator of scientific literature" and "the people's psychology professor."[24] A contemporary observer remarked admiringly, "From a scientific point of view, her presentation is excellent. Unlike other popularizers, she mentions sources, attributes findings to the proper finder, leaves the percentages unrounded, and does not hesitate to tack on a footnote or two."[25] Dr. Brothers became a very popular and respected authority for many Americans.

There was one catch: Brothers did not write much of her own material. That task often fell to Barbara Seaman, her first ghostwriter and, in Seaman's words, "alter ego for Dr. Brothers."[26] In 1972, years after her tenure with Brothers ended, Seaman finally admitted the truth to a reporter. Insisting on anonymity, she fretted, "Oh dear, this is going to embarrass Joyce because she's so secretive about the fact that she doesn't do her own writing."[27] Ironically, although Brothers "made it" as one of the first female celebrity doctors thanks to the gravitas afforded by her doctorate in psychology, she was still reliant on a cohort of un-credentialed female subordinates such as Seaman to do her work for her.

Seaman spent several years as Brothers's ghostwriter, helping to establish the *Good Housekeeping* column as a popular feature—one that ultimately spanned four decades.[28] Publicly, Brothers insisted that she personally wrote her columns and read all of her reader's inquiries. She only admitted to hiring "gals" or "researchers" to help her put together her brochures. In reality, Seaman was paid nearly a hundred dollars a week to survey the current psychiatric literature, summarize the relevant information on a particular topic, and translate it into advice column format. She even made up the questions on occasion. According to one journalist investigating Brothers's ghostwriters, "Most of [the readers' questions] are fabricated by the writers, usually on the basis of a research paper they wish to quote."[29] Brothers, of course, signed off on the final product.

Plant, *Mom: The Transformation of Motherhood in Modern America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

23 Jane Shattuc, *The Talking Cure: TV Talk Shows and Women* (New York: Routledge, 1997), 30.

24 Patrick McGrady, "Will the Real Joyce Brothers Please?" in *The Love Doctors* (New York: Macmillan, 1972), 129. An annotated copy of this chapter appears in Carton 1, Folder 51, Barbara Seaman Papers.

25 Ibid, 129-130.

26 Ibid, 136.

27 Ibid, 136-137.

28 Barbara Yuncker, "Woman in the News: Barbara Seaman, A Reporter Finds a Cause," *New York Post*, 24 January 1970, in Box 23, Folder 6, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

29 Patrick McGrady, "Will the Real Joyce Brothers Please?" 133.

Seaman wrote on many different topics for Brothers. One early piece examined "the value of funerals," while another offered a glimpse into "the mind of an assassin," using Lee Harvey Oswald and Jack Ruby as her case studies (their respective assassinations, of President Kennedy and Oswald himself, were then hot news stories).[30] Seaman's ghostwritten columns for *Good Housekeeping* included one on the "unhappiness of bachelors" in modern society and another titled, "The ABCs of Living With Teenagers."[31] She even drafted a speech for Brothers to deliver to the Anti-Defamation League on the subject of being Jewish in America (an experience they both shared).[32] With the high volume of work, it was a relatively steady income for a new writer.

While this was a welcome job, and a flexible one considering her three small children, Seaman still had ambitions to publish under her own name. But despite her extensive research and writing experience, she could not publicly use her Brothers ghostwriting as a credential. And, of course, she was still not a physician. Beginning in the mid-1960s, Seaman co-authored pieces with her physician husband Gideon, blending her writing skills with his medical expertise. For the rest of the decade, Seaman's primary identification to her readers was that of "psychiatrist's wife."

Although this was characterized as a writing partnership, and Gideon was certainly involved in the creation, editing, and promotion of their written work, it was an unequal one. Sloppy editing in one of their earliest co-authored pieces hints at this arrangement. In "How to Prepare Your Baby for Harvard," published in 1965 in the parents' magazine *My Baby*, the authors were listed as "Gideon Seaman, M.D. and Barbara Seaman." Yet the article is written in the first-person, generally summarizing current understandings of child development, with no reference to Gideon's clinical experience. At one point, the text clearly reveals Barbara's perspective, relating a personal experience: "Of course I know this is easier to say than do, especially when a first child is concerned. Even my own husband, who is a psychiatrist, got a little shaky when the first toddler in our family went on his first climbing spree."[33] For an article ostensibly written by a husband and wife team, it is bizarre that the wife (the secondary author) would relate an anecdote that assumes the reader is unaware that her husband (and, indeed, the article's primary author) was a psychiatrist.

The Seamans' partnership went beyond piecemeal freelance articles when they earned their own recurring pop-psychology feature in *Bride's* magazine. Appearing in 1965 and 1966, their series was titled "Understanding Your Marriage." When *Bride's* readers were introduced to the authors, the byline for the inaugural article, "Sexual Harmony," heavily emphasized Gideon's medical credentials. "Dr. Seaman," the magazine noted, "is a practicing psychiatrist who has worked extensively with young couples on their marital adjustment problems. He is on the faculty of the New York School of

30 "The Value of Funerals" and "The Mind of an Assassin" drafts, Box 11, Folder 26, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

31 Barbara Seaman to Mrs. Fisher, 23 August 1965, Box 32, folder 2, Barbara Seaman Additional papers.

32 Speech draft, undated, Box 11, Folder 26, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers; Lester Waldman to Joyce Brothers, 3 June 1965, Box 11, Folder 26, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

33 Gideon Seaman, M.D. and Barbara Seaman, "How to Prepare your Baby for Harvard," *My Baby*, 23, 32. February 1965, Box 33, folder 10, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

Psychiatry and the State University of New York Medical School and is a research fellow of the National Institute of Mental Health." "Mrs. Seaman," it added briefly, "is a former social worker who writes on practical psychology." Readers were encouraged if they had a problem or question "that they would like Dr. Seaman to discuss," to write to him at *Bride's* headquarters on 42nd Street.[34] Later editions of "Understanding Your Marriage," such as the article "How Much Can You Change a Man?" even omitted Barbara's authorship entirely.[35]

Due to the intimate and elusive nature of Barbara and Gideon's working relationship, it is at times difficult to read as a historian relying on archival sources.[36] When writing to another literary agent in 1965, Seaman explained, "you were kind enough to say that you would consider becoming my agent. (Perhaps it would be more accurate to say 'our' agent since my husband's ideas and names are involved in much of this.)"[37] During the promotion of the column, the reality of the arrangement was explained differently depending on the context. During a local radio show interview arranged by the publishers to promote the first "Understanding Our Marriage" article, the host of the "Jewish Home Show" explained: "Barbara Seaman, I think we should tell our listeners that you did the writing of this article in *Bride's* magazine, but that your husband, Dr. Gideon Seaman, is a practicing psychiatrist. It is his experiences with marital adjustments which form the basis for the essay."[38] On the other hand, when *Bride's* chose to promote the column on television rather than radio, it was Gideon who got to sit in front of the camera while Barbara stayed at home.[39] Barbara's authorship was only selectively revealed to certain (more domestic, feminine) audiences, while Gideon and his medical credentials remained the primary selling point of their articles.

At this point in Seaman's career, she occupied a complicated and ambiguous position. To the public she was placed in the role of subordinate helper, deferential to her husband and dependent on his medical credentials. Gideon's identity as a psychiatrist was a critical bargaining chip, allowing her to publish in the first place. His expertise, in

34 Gideon Seaman, M.D., with Barbara Seaman, "Understanding Your Marriage: Sexual Harmony," *Bride's*, Autumn 1965, 126-127, 176.

35 Gideon Seaman, M.D., with Barbara Seaman, "Understanding Your Marriage: How Much Can You Change a Man?" *Bride's*, April/May 1966, 114-115, 203, 208.

36 In one undated letter from this early period about a draft article, Seaman passed along three of Gideon's rather incisive editorial comments to her own editor. To the manuscript was appended a circular sticker, pre-signed with the letter "G." Barbara's initial, by contrast, is signed directly on the page. Barbara Seaman to Lois, undated, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

Elsewhere, she described Gideon's editorial perfectionism, saying that he "nearly has a fit when he sees an article, - in JAMA for example, - where, despite the 6 or 8 authors and numerous editors through whose hands it has passed, some glaring error remains in usage or clarity." She also reported Gideon's eager engagement with the latest in medical science, saying, for example, that he had "been following this research quite carefully." Barbara Seaman to Lois, 17 October 1965, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

37 Barbara Seaman to Mrs. Fisher, 23 August 1965, Box 32, folder 2, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

38 Curtis Co. memo and attached radio transcript, 18 November 1965, Box 41, Folder 8, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

39 Peter Gulotta to Gideon Seaman, 18 November 1965, Box 41, Folder 8, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

large part, made things possible. But Seaman's identity as the psychiatrist's wife and partner conveyed its own sort of credibility. Even if readers were unaware of the extent of her control of the Seaman research and publication agenda, the mere alliance and association with her husband's knowledge afforded her a hybrid expertise. Several years later, when a journalist for the *New York Post* visited their Upper West Side apartment to conduct an interview, she noticed "Gideon's piles of unfinished medical journal-reading lie on one side of their double bed and hers on the other."[40] There was a symbolic transference of expertise, somehow, through marriage. Yet he was still the doctor, and she the doctor's wife.

Seaman's role as a wife and mother also became more complicated during this time. As she shifted her primary public identity to that of deputy psychiatrist and her publishing workload increased, she had less free time for parenting and other household duties. When she began writing, Gideon agreed to hire a housekeeper.[41] And so in the fall of 1965, as the first *Bride's* articles were going to press, she hired a nineteen-year-old Black single mother to keep her house. Ann Wilson, originally from rural Georgia, "became [Barbara's] right arm," working daily in the Seaman household from 10am until 7:30pm. Her duties included cleaning, cooking, and keeping the children (aged 8, 5, and 3 in 1965) entertained. For tasks that Wilson could not complete, like lifting very heavy objects, Seaman also hired a strong man to assist her once or twice a week.[42] Like her mentor Joyce Brothers, Seaman was also dependent upon the paid labor of other women.

Daily life in the Seaman household reflected the complexity of Barbara's dual roles. While Wilson kept the house and watched the children, both Gideon and Barbara worked from home. Gideon had his psychiatric practice based out of a home office, which spanned four rooms. The children could not go into his locked office; he was not to be disturbed while working. When patients were visiting, the children were not even allowed to use the living or dining rooms. His professional practice was truly private and separate from home life, despite sharing a physical space. Barbara's, on the other hand, was a chaotic blend of the two worlds. Rather than having her own office, even a much smaller one, she worked out of the bedroom.[43] As daughter Elana reflected about her mother during her earliest years, "She used to walk around the house with a cigarette hanging out of her mouth and the phone ringing off the hook and big piles of books and papers on her bed. She didn't even bother to take the books off the bed when she went to sleep."[44] While Gideon was closed off to the children during business hours, Barbara was not. She was "fully available" to them, subject to frequent interruptions. Her other daughter, Shira, recalled, "She did a lot of work on the phone, which

40 Barbara Yuncker, "Woman in the News: Barbara Seaman, A Reporter Finds a Cause."

41 Barbara Seaman, "A Mother's Story," in *The Conversation Begins: Mothers and Daughters Talk About Living Feminism*, ed. Christina Looper Baker and Christina Baker Kline (New York: Bantam Books, 1996), 125.

42 Ibid.

43 Elana Seaman, "A Daughter's Story," in *The Conversation Begins*, 128-133; Shira Seaman, "A Daughter's Story," in *The Conversation Begins*, 134-139.

44 Elana Seaman, "A Daughter's Story," 133.

sounded to us like socializing, so we felt that we could disturb her at any time."[45] Elana added that they "were always trying to capture her attention, and were sometimes angry at her because she seemed to be half there, with her mind somewhere else."[46] She was "there and not there," being a housewife but not cooking or cleaning, being a full-time mother while working from home, breaking into the publishing world from her bedroom.[47]

Despite her hectic work environment, Seaman still managed to keep advancing in her career. Shortly after "Understanding Your Marriage" began, the *Bride's* editors began planning a book-length version of the column. They wanted it to be a short guide for newlyweds on how to pick a contraceptive method, like the diaphragm and spermicides and the new and wildly popular birth control pill. The individual chapters were to be dedicated to a particular method, its strengths and weaknesses, and its medical and psychological impacts. The executives at Conde Nast told her that they had "something of a seller's market with this book" and that they "may be able to pick and choose among several good publishers." There was "so much interest and confusion about the new methods," as she wrote to an agent, that they believed it could be "very successful."[48] Between this opportunity and all of the promotional appearances, the *Bride's* column was proving very successful.

But Seaman was still trying to break into solo publishing. She joined the prestigious Society for Magazine Writers around this time, which introduced her to many prominent writers, including *Feminine Mystique* author and soon-to-be National Organization for Women co-founder Betty Friedan.[49] No longer a bewildered outsider, Seaman now socialized with people in strategic positions of power. An editor from the *Saturday Evening Post* tipped her off to a change in management at the *Ladies' Home Journal*, noting that the new executive editor, Peter Wyden, was a close friend. Seaman sent a receptive Wyden a number of article pitches, including the idea of a column titled "What's New in Psychiatry and Psychology." Wyden responded with interest, prompting Seaman to next send him an outline of an article on the psychology of contraceptive failure and a few shorter samples.[50]

Writing for the *Ladies' Home Journal* represented a transitional period in Seaman's career as a journalist. Wyden responded to her inquiry by telling her to write up the article on contraceptive failure and he tentatively agreed to a psychology news feature such as the one she suggested. His only concern was that Seaman did not reuse any material from the Brothers column in *Good Housekeeping*, a major business rival.[51] While this did represent a breakthrough for Seaman in terms of presenting her work as hers alone, the *Journal* ultimately published a mixture of pieces, frequently attributing work to the

45 Shira Seaman, "A Daughter's Story," 134.
46 Elana Seaman, "A Daughter's Story," 132.
47 Barbara Seaman, "A Mother's Story," 121.
48 Barbara Seaman to Mrs. Fisher, 23 August 1965, Box 32, folder 2, Barbara Seaman Additional papers.
49 Elizabeth S. Watkins, *The Estrogen Elixir: A History of Hormone Replacement Therapy in* America (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2007), 120.
50 Barbara Seaman to Mrs. Fisher, 23 August 1965, Box 32, folder 2, Barbara Seaman Additional papers.
51 Ibid.

couple as a pair, and always highlighting Gideon's degree and clinical experience. In the spring of 1966, for example, the *Journal* featured "It's In Your Mind: Useful News of Psychology and Psychiatry," by Barbara Seaman. The nearly full-page article consisted of five short blurbs about a recently published book or scientific study relating to human psychology. Seaman translated these sources into breezy synopses that the average *Journal* reader could understand, offering no critical engagement beyond an occasional word of advice. "If you select a rare or unusual name for your baby, you may handicap him socially," she warned readers, citing a recent study. In each section, Seaman quoted a different "Dr.," listing their title and institutional affiliation, and explained to readers what conclusions to draw from their scientific works.

Ironically, even though Seaman was already leaning on the authority of the physicians whose work she wrote about, this new *Journal* feature quickly changed to feature her husband as her co-author. A number of draft pieces were still written in first-person and list "Barbara Seaman, with Gideon Seaman, M.D." as the authors. But eventually "It's In Your Mind," by Gideon Seaman, M.D., and Barbara Seaman, became the recurring *Journal* feature. Seaman was slowly becoming an author in her own right, but still depended on others' medical authority as a tool for advancement.

ADVANCED SCIENCE WRITING

By this point in her career, Seaman was comfortable engaging with scientific literatures and interpreting new medical findings for popular audiences. In her negotiations with Wyden, she confidently evaluated the state of the psychiatric field. As she wrote to her potential agent in 1965 about her entry into the *Ladies' Home Journal*, she considered herself ahead of the curve in understanding the most cutting edge research and how to pitch it to magazines. Recent material used for *Good Housekeeping*, she noted, was "so to speak, the popular cream of last May's psychiatric papers." The *Journal*, she noted, "could have been the first with all of this, if the columns [she submitted to Wyden] had been used right away." After hearing back from Wyden, she "held" several more recent studies, saving them for use in the new *Journal* column rather than in the Brothers column, which she was still ghostwriting.[52] Earning a number of single-authored article publications on top of her co-authored column, in the second half of the 1960s Seaman came into her own as a reporter on scientific and medical news.

In addition to increased exposure, the job at *Ladies' Home Journal* came with a significant boost in pay. The magazine also paid for research expenses, like out of town trips to conferences and medical meetings. Seaman recalled later that during this time she "began to take [herself] very seriously as someone reporting on contraception." At these conferences that the *Journal* paid for her to attend, she continued speaking to scientists and physicians. She noted, "everybody had their own axe to grind, and after a while I learned how to ask the right questions."[53] She steadily grew more confident approaching experts in a conference environment.

52 Barbara Seaman to Mrs. Fisher, 23 August 1965, Box 32, folder 2, Barbara Seaman Additional papers.

53 Barbara Seaman, interview by Elizabeth Watkins, 30 January 1994, transcript. Hereafter this source will be referred to as "Watkins 1994 interview."

One such conference was the 1965 annual meeting of the newly renamed Association for Voluntary Sterilization, which Seaman attended for background research on the procedure for her next article. The organization, with deep ties to the eugenic movement earlier in the century, was in the process of reframing its promotion of "permanent contraception" as a positive force in the context of growing concerns about overpopulation.[54] At the meeting, where Seaman attended talks and interviewed individual researchers, she was turned off by what she saw. "It's ghastly," she wrote to Wyden, observing, "Many of the people who are for sterilization have a real true believer spirit." Many proponents, in her view, were fanatical. When one of the AVS officers distributed what she considered an overly zealous pro-sterilization article which had been published in *Time*, she "asked him how he had the gall" to do that. She felt "so sorry for all those poor people who are needlessly submitting themselves to sterilization," and considered the whole debate a "very tacky business." Population controllers, she believed, were putting their personal beliefs about reproduction above women's autonomy. Even tackier, she related in her letter, was her interaction with a conference attendee, who drunkenly leered at her, confessing that he had only attended the meeting "because he likes New York girls."[55] Beyond this unsavory experience, Seaman was developing a growing distaste for a certain kind of mixing of science and politics (here represented by population control supporters), as well as a growing confidence to contradict experts when she saw fit.

In addition to attending conferences, Seaman also surveyed the medical literature and wrote to a wide range of experts in the field. One such contact, the Chief of Natality Statistics of the Department of Health, Education, and Welfare's Division of Vital Statistics, responded to her request for information with a multi-page letter explaining his views on sterilization as a contraceptive option. Providing statistics and additional information, he also sent along a relevant article on the subject, currently at the page proof stage.[56] This access to information at the conference talk and pre-publication stages gave Seaman insight into the most up-to-date knowledge on particular subjects. She also sometimes had her expert contacts read what she wrote about their findings, giving them the opportunity to correct potential misunderstandings.[57] If being a doctor's wife had not already made her feel an insider, then she certainly appeared to be one by this point.

Seaman's breakthrough magazine articles do not hint at her later, famously critical approach. Her first sole-authored article since *Mother's Manual*, published in the *Journal* in 1965, appeared as part of the magazine's recurring "Tell Me, Doctor" series. Titled "Why Did Birth Control Fail For Me?" the article focused on the psychological

54 For more on the history of the Association for Voluntary Sterilization and the politics of sterilization in this period, see Rebecca Kluchin, *Fit to be Tied: Sterilization and Reproductive Rights in America, 1950-1980* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2009).

55 Barbara Seaman to Peter Wyden, 1 October 1965, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

56 Arthur Campbell to Barbara Seaman, 29 September 1965, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

57 William David Walden to Barbara Seaman, 27 November 1965, Box 33, Folder 5, Barbara Seaman Additional Papers.

reasons behind unplanned pregnancies. Even diligent contraception, she related, "can be undermined by illogical and often well-hidden emotions and desires." She pointed out that human nature, rather than the failure of contraceptive methods themselves, could be responsible for some accidental pregnancies.[58] Even her *Journal* articles in the later 1960s were more neutral and deferential. In one, she summarized the findings of William Masters and Virginia Johnson's sexological research studies. In "Sex Scientists' Two-Week Cure for Problems You Can't Tell Your Husband," she translated their statistical findings and general conclusions into practical advice for her readers.[59]

But her journalistic style would change dramatically when, in the fall of 1967, she enrolled in the Advanced Science Writing Program at Columbia. The relatively young program had been established in 1958. Funded by the Alfred P. Sloan and Rockefeller Foundations, it aimed, as the school newspaper quoted the dean of the School of Journalism upon its launch, "to help provide an increased volume of vitally needed accurate, interestingly written news of science and technological developments as a means of increasing popular understanding of science."[60] The program targeted early career journalists who had between three and six years experience in writing news. It taught them how to access, read, and interpret new scientific research into publicly accessible format.[61] It was in the program, Seaman said, that she "learned to tell a good study from a poor one."[62] Students of the program underwent "supervised study of selected research and development projects," attended seminars, spoke freely with university scientists, and attended "special meetings with both university and industrial research and development leaders."[63] In this academic environment, Seaman honed her skills.

Continuing to research contraceptive options, by now a long-standing interest, Seaman narrowed her focus to the birth control pill. Since she had begun researching contraception, several new studies about the new method had appeared. Encouraged by her journalism professor and program director, John Foster, Seaman decided to pursue this research further.[64] While she continued going to meetings and reading new studies on the Pill, she began to apply a more critical lens. But she was not only speaking to professionals; each time she wrote about contraception or promoted her column or did a TV interview, she would receive letters from readers, which she described as a "wonderful source of research." As she later recalled in an interview, "They helped me to determine what side effects were common and what side effects were not even mentioned in the medical literature." Building on her training at Columbia, she developed her own, modified criteria for evaluating the science of side effects. "Once I heard about

58 Barbara Seaman, "Why Did Birth Control Fail For Me?" *Ladies' Home Journal*, November 1965, 166-7.

59 Barbara Seaman, "Sex Scientists' Two-Week Cure for Problems You Can't Tell Your Husband," *Ladies' Home Journal*, August 1968, 54.

60 "New Science Writing Plan Is Announced," *Columbia Daily Spectator* (Columbia University), 20 December 1957.

61 James Boylan, *Pulitzer's School: Columbia University's School of Journalism, 1903-2003* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2003), 140.

62 "Thoughts On My Life" draft, Carton 1, folder 7, Barbara Seaman Papers.

63 "New Science Writing Plan Is Announced," *Columbia Daily Spectator*.

64 Watkins 1994 interview.

something from a half dozen different women who seemed perfectly sane and reliable and could give me their exact history," she reflected, "I knew that this was very likely to be a side effect, so then I would go and look and see if there had been some little clinical study somewhere."[65] She seemed proud of her ability to see connections that others had not yet, to synthesize disparate and obscure bits of information, and to see the value in evidence provided directly by women patients.[66]

Seaman used this research as the basis for another *Journal* article, titled "Why Doctors Are Losing Faith in the Pill." "Physicians don't like to talk about it," she wrote, "but an increasing number are taking their own wives and daughters off the pill" due to a growing awareness of the drug's side effects.[67] The article took a somewhat alarmist stance, grimly reporting on side effects and featuring pessimistic quotes from physicians and women patients who had negative personal experiences with the Pill. In response, Seaman's readers sent in "one sad case history after another" to the *Journal*, confirming her deep skepticism about the severity of side effects and many doctors' unwillingness to connect the dots.[68]

It was around this time Wyden left his position at the *Journal* to start his own publishing company, and he promised Seaman a spot on his first list of books.[69] Under the tutelage of Wyden and his wife, frequently at their home in Connecticut, Seaman expanded her research on the birth control pill into a book-length investigation.[70] In what was ultimately titled *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, published in October 1969, Seaman systematically detailed all of the reported side effects of the Pill that she could find. She devoted whole chapters to topics like "Strokes and the Pill," "Cancer and the Pill," "Diabetes and the Pill," "How the Pill Can Spoil Sex." There were eleven of these side effects chapters alone, each with descriptions of the conditions, statistics, and first-hand accounts of women who experienced the side effects. In a final chapter, she profiled the various alternative contraceptive methods beyond the Pill women could still reliably and safety use. One of these options included the intrauterine device (IUD) and, specifically, the one developed by the author of the book's foreword, Dr. Hugh Davis. Seaman, however, admitted that some problems still existed with IUD, including the potential for discomfort, spontaneous expulsion from the cervix, or the development of infections. Seaman was most enthusiastic about the diaphragm, combined with spermicidal jelly.[71]

65 Ibid.

66 For a similar story of women valuing their own medical evidence, see Leslie Reagan, *Dangerous Pregnancies: Mothers, Disabilities, and Abortion in Modern America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010).

67 Barbara Seaman, "Why Doctors Are Losing Faith in 'the Pill,'" *Ladies' Home Journal*, April 1969, 72, 74, 76, 78, 166-167.

68 Barbara Yuncker, "Woman in the News: Barbara Seaman, A Reporter Finds a Cause."

69 Ibid.

70 Watkins 1994 interview.

71 Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill* (Greenwich, CT: Peter Wyden, 1969).

THE CASE AGAINST THE DOCTORS

While the side effects of the Pill seemed very dangerous, Seaman argued, the biggest threat was what she called "the silence that could kill you" – that is, the unwillingness of doctors to share this essential information with patients.[72] For most women, she explained, "The deceptively easy act of swallowing the innocent-looking pill is, in fact, an act of *uninformed* consent."[73] Early in the book she asked, "How many pill-users would still be taking these drugs if wives and husbands were fully informed about the drugs' risks and about the disenchantment and dismay that are increasingly disturbing the inner councils of the medical profession?" "There is no way of knowing," she answered, "until the full facts are laid before the public."[74] How, she wondered, was it possible that women were not aware of this damning information? She concluded, "Much of the evidence has been buried, in bits and pieces, in technical journals that are not accessible."[75] In Seaman's view, it was the responsibility of science writers such as herself to step in and make this information available to the general public. In translating the Pill studies, she was bringing vital knowledge to the people.

Drug companies did, in fact, supply information along with their product—a detailed "prescribing information" booklet for physicians, as well as a shorter guidebook for patients. Seaman noted that the typical prescribing information booklet was over 3,000 words long and filled with complicated scientific tables. One such booklet for Wyeth Laboratories' Ovral consisted of fifteen pages of information about the pharmacology of the pill, its potential side effects, statistics about its failure rate, and data from scientific studies of its use.[76] The average practitioner reading this 1963 booklet would have learned that certain things, like nausea, breast changes, and depression were observed side effects, while others, like the development of blood clots were also potential—though not yet statistically proven—areas of concern. The highly technical booklets certainly gave the appearance of providing comprehensive, up-to-date information about this new type of drug.

As for the simpler booklets intended for patients, Seaman considered them woefully inadequate. In general, she found the "general tone of these booklets" to be "so comforting" that "the warnings were lost on many women." The lists of side effects contained within these materials were also much shorter. They focused primarily on the minor side effects, noting that they were usually temporary. The booklets she found in circulation were also frequently out of date in terms of the rapidly expanding scientific knowledge about the drug's side effects. As of 1969, when she examined some of these sources, she found that manufacturers often still had booklets in circulation from

72 "The Silence That Could Kill You" was the title of chapter one. Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, 25th Anniversary Updated Edition (Alameda, CA: Hunter House, 1995). I refer to this edition when citing page numbers from this book, which was reproduced in its entirety for the reissue.

73 Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, 12.

74 Ibid, 204-206.

75 Ibid, 13.

76 Wyeth Laboratories, Ovral Prescribing Information booklet, May 1968, in "Contraception, Oral," Michael S. Burnhill Collection, Special Collections, American Congress of Obstetrics and Gynecology, Washington, D.C.

1965 and 1966. Seaman declared these booklets "entirely too reassuring" for the times and felt that the most important information for patients was being lost in translation, as the manufacturers presented women patients with misleading and watered-down information.[77]

Seaman also indicated that women could not trust that all doctors to have equal measures of clinical wisdom. With varying degrees of paternalism within the profession of medicine, there was no way of truly knowing if a physician was withholding critical background knowledge informing his advice. The very best clinicians were similar to her own gynecologist, whose practices she profiled in the book's third chapter, "How Doctors Treat Their Pill Patients." "If a woman is lucky," she wrote, "she will find a doctor with the following qualifications: 1. A great thirst for reading and a strong determination to keep up with the medical literature, even outside his own specialty. 2. A belief in informed consent. He would not be an impatient authority figure who treats patients like children. 3. Time."[78] Unfortunately, Seaman reflected, in the current state of modern medicine, "many doctors don't have time, inclination or knowledge to dispense the pill in this fashion. Most women therefore learn 'all about the pill' from booklets, which are quite likely to be illustrated with flowers."[79] In other words, women were given unacceptably incomplete information from the drug manufacturers and unacceptably patronizing treatment from their doctors.

Seaman also argued throughout *Doctors' Case* that individual experience held special significance for physicians and patients alike. The women patients featured in the book possessed unique knowledge that physicians lacked. In essence, they knew their own bodies best. Although at the time of writing her book Seaman was not yet involved with other women's health movement figures such as the women of the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, she presaged some of their core arguments about women's autonomy and body knowledge.[80] Implicitly, Seaman argued that patients, rather than physicians, were the ultimate authorities over their physical well being; this put the two groups on equal footing in the doctor-patient relationship, despite physicians' deeply ingrained ethos of paternalism. Physicians and patients were, in fact, co-creators of clinical knowledge.

In her chapter "How the Pill Can Spoil Sex," Seaman profiled one woman who exemplified this ideal vision of medical practice. After experiencing low libido, a new pill patient sought out her doctor's opinion on this troubling symptom. The doctor listened to her complaints, looked up the most recent studies of the pill, and saw the connection. He reassured the patient that it was not all in her mind, and that it was "pretty well established that the hormones in the pill could decrease sexual enjoyment."[81] The patient talked it through with her doctor, made a cost-benefit analysis in her head, and ultimately the pair decided on a long-range "on and off" regimen to reap the benefits for a preexisting medical condition while reducing her exposure to the estrogens and

77 Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, 21.
78 Ibid.
79 Ibid, 105.
80 For more on the Boston Women's Health Book Collective, see Wendy Kline, *Bodies of Knowledge*.
81 Barbara Seaman, *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*, 105.

providing windows of increased libido. This profile represented an ideal clinical case in Seaman's view. There was obvious mutual respect between the two parties, the doctor dedicated abundant time to this single case, and the interaction resulted in a personalized plan of care. Seaman emphasized the patient's key role in the clinical encounter, quoting the woman directly: "Thanks to me, my doctor now warns patients who don't have to take the pill for medical reasons that this is one side effect they should look out for." Seaman presumed that this particular doctor "had probably relied on the information about sex drive that is provided by the drug company literature for patients," the booklets that she found inadequate. Fortunately, she surmised, "this patient opened his eyes to the facts."[82]

The heart of *Doctors' Case* was a profile of another woman Seaman discovered in the course of her research. In the evocative chapter "Julie is Not a Statistic," she appealed to her readers with a gripping human-interest story. Although Seaman used a pseudonym, she nevertheless followed "Julie" from birth to her untimely death at the hands of the birth control pill, weaving her romantic and medical histories into a tragic tale. Julie "was not the type to be stampeded" and "had been independent even when she was a baby."[83] The heroic widower of the story, "Tom," first grieved, then sought revenge. He had learned from an emergency room doctor that Julie's pulmonary embolism had likely been a side effect of her birth control pills. He sued the pill's manufacturer for wrongful death, ultimately losing the case due to conflicting expert testimony about the likelihood that the clot had been specifically provoked by the pill. Eliciting sympathy for Julie and her desperate husband with her heartbreaking details, Seaman used this case study to humanize the consequences of combining dubious pharmaceuticals with negligent medical care.[84]

It was not the Pill alone that killed Julie, Seaman stressed. This particular tragedy rested on her gynecologist's sin of omission, and on the arrogance of his paternalism. The physician, "Dr. Wood," had prescribed Julie oral contraceptives in what he thought was good faith. Seaman disagreed: "He testified in court that he had read drug company pamphlets and medical literature reporting more than 400 cases of clotting and 37 deaths among pill users through 1964," she pointed out to readers. He had done his due diligence in researching the risks of the drug. "Nevertheless," Seaman continued, he prescribed the pill the very next year "without warning her of its possibly dangerous side effects." The doctor, for his part, found the risk of side effects based on the statistical evidence to be "quite small" and told the court, "I think the physician is supposed to exercise judgment. That's what I did. I felt I would be doing the lady a disservice to report it to her. You can scare a patient to death." Seaman was not satisfied by this answer, preferring an alternate scenario in which Julie had been able to make a more educated decision about her own healthcare. "The fact is" Seaman lamented, "Julie would not have been 'scared to death' if the doctor had come straight out and told her the risks

82 Ibid.
83 Ibid, 62.
84 Ibid., 61-87.

she was facing."[85] The risk of being scared to death was fictitious; the risk of developing a lethal blood clot after taking the pill, though statistically small, was very real.

CONCLUSION

Just before *Doctors' Case* went to press in the fall of 1969, Seaman learned of yet another journalist who was planning to publish a book about oral contraceptives. It was to be called *The Case Against the Pill*, Seaman's own tentative title. While this other book ultimately never materialized, she needed a new name for hers. Her publisher pointed out that she had, after all, gotten the doctors in her book to admit that the pill caused many side effects, so he suggested using that fact to their advantage. Seaman did not like the title *The Doctors' Case Against the Pill*. It "made me furious," she reflected years later.[86] In reality, the case against the Pill presented in the book was uniquely Seaman's. On top of that, the awkward apostrophe in the title presents problems to this day. The book is still frequently referred to as *The Doctor's Case Against the Pill*, mistakenly and ironically conveying Seaman all the authority of a practicing physician to the casual reader.

In the burgeoning field of postwar science writing (and later, feminist critique), Barbara Seaman made a career translating current scientific and medical understandings for a primarily educated, female audience to consume. As she advanced through her training and specialization, her encounters with what she perceived as a dark underbelly of the medical establishment prompted a shift in her tone. While in *Doctors' Case* she was still primarily translating experts' findings, she now openly criticized practices when she felt it was necessary for the public good. Like a classic muckraker, she hoped to publicly shame them into recognizing their flaws. By the mid-1970s, when she wrote to *Who's Who*, her newly recognized authorial voice joined a chorus of other critics of American medicine. This included an entire new social movement: the women's health movement. But it would be a mistake to point to 1970, the year of the Nelson Pill Hearings and the first printing of "Women and their Bodies" (the predecessor to *Our Bodies, Ourselves*) as the origin of this heated discussion. As Seaman's early career, beginning a decade prior, shows, constraints of gender and heavily guarded medical expertise had to be overcome in order to start the conversation. Writing, once permitted, grew into skepticism, which grew into advocacy; this advocacy then provided an entirely new catalyst for change.

85 Ibid, 61.
86 Watkins 1994 interview.