

Sexology (1904) by William Henry Walling

In 1904, physician William Henry Walling published *Sexology*, a family medicine reference book. In his book, Walling proposed that his guidance would help people who were married or single and young or old, as well as anyone who wanted to conform to, what he claims are, gender expectations. *Sexology* discusses issues such as masturbation, abortion, pregnancy, labor, and marriage. Despite Walling's limited scientific explanations and evidence for his medical claims, the Puritan Publishing Company printed and distributed the book, which received many positive reviews and endorsements from other physicians, college presidents, politicians, and religious leaders. However, in the twenty-first century, people may consider many of Walling's claims to be sexist and oppressive toward women. *Sexology* provides readers with examples of historical medical misconceptions of male and female anatomy and provides context for the logic of reproductive medicine at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1836, William Henry Walling was born in Smithville, New York. Walling served for the Union hospital service in the US Civil War during the 1860s, receiving a Congressional Medal of Honor for his service. In 1889, Walling received his medical degree from Medico-Chirurgical College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. He worked as a physician and professor of gynecology at Eastern College in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, as well as a professor at Medico-Chirurgical College. Walling also served as the editor for the Philadelphia Medical Times and Register, a bi-weekly medical journal, and was a member of the Medical Society of New Jersey. Walling studied a variety of medical issues, including sexual health and wellness, electrotherapy, women's reproductive medicine, urology, or the study of the urinary tract, and malignant diseases of the rectum.

In 1904, Walling published his book, *Sexology*, which provides context on the state of reproductive medicine and relationship psychology during the early 1900s. During that time, abortion, or the medical termination of pregnancy, and the use of contraception were criminal offenses, and physicians often diagnosed women with female hysteria. That was a diagnosis for women who experienced symptoms that ranged from headaches and shortness of breath to hypersexuality. However, in 1893, Johns Hopkins School of Medicine in Baltimore, Maryland, was established, reflecting a rise in medical education in the US during the turn of the century, which allowed for better understanding of the human body and reproductive medicine. Later on in the twentieth century, feminist scholars argued that ideas such as female hysteria were methods to oppress women rather than a legitimate medical diagnosis. As of 2021, female hysteria is no longer a medical diagnosis, as symptoms that were once considered to be hysteria are now often associated with other medical diagnoses, such as pre-menstrual syndrome or depression.

Walling divides *Sexology* into five major sections. The book begins with an introductory section in which Walling explains that the purpose of the book is to educate people about sexual health matters and warn against hypersexuality. In the next section, Walling discusses health and wellness in boys and girls, describing the proper upbringing for healthy young men and women and behavior expectations for both. In that section, Walling also elaborates on the extreme dangers of masturbation and non-penetrative sex in sections on male and female masturbation. Then, in the third section, Walling discusses married life and the politics surrounding marriage, detailing his opposition to abortion, support of marital, heterosexual sex, and warnings about hypersexuality. In the fourth section, Walling focuses on pregnancy and the care of infants, though he mentions other topics such as sterility, maladies during pregnancy, and labor. In the final section of the book, Walling details how to raise, what he refers to as, proper boys and girls that fit into their natural gender roles and prepare them for marriage.

In the introductory section, called "Part 1. Introduction," Walling claims that before he wrote his book, friends, physicians, and daily papers and journals misadvised many people about sexual health matters. Walling states that he derived the evidence for the facts that he presents in *Sexology* from distinguished European and American physicians, professors, lawyers, preachers, and other, what he refers to as, brilliant minds. Walling acknowledges that some readers may be critical of his views, but he reassures his audience that he based the book on medical evidence. Walling also warns those who hope for scandalous topics that his book will only cause them concern after readers learn about what he refers to as the dangers and evils of hypersexuality. According to Walling, those dangers and evils largely result from women not conforming to their traditional gender roles.

The second major section of Walling's book focuses on the health and wellness of boys and girls and their maturation into young men and women, including four parts called "Part II. Boys and Young Men, Their Education and Training," "Part III. Girls and Young Women, Their Education and Training," "Part IV. Masturbation, Male," and "Part V. Masturbation, Female." In Part II, Walling states that it is dangerous for boys to engage in overtly sexual behaviors. Walling claims that it is important for boys' educators and parents to suppress those, what he refers to as, evils. One of those evils, for example, is unmarried boys sleeping in the same bed as girls, which Walling states can lead to terrible consequences.

Then, Walling opens Part III with a claim that American women are deteriorating and losing their femininity. Walling states that errors of US society, such as women who spend less time at home, led to the poor condition of women. Walling explains that contrary to all other species, humans are not perpetuating their race with strong and healthy women. Rather, Walling claims that humans are unnaturally devolving. Thus, he explains that preservation of humans depends on, what he terms, the physical improvement of the mothers of the race. Walling then details, according to his point of view, the dangers of women who live in cities and attend educational lessons, stating that those experiences are incompatible with femininity. In that part, Walling also elaborates further on gender expectations of women. He claims that women have an inherent love of fashion and appearance that men do not possess. Additionally, Walling claims that women who are not married, following their primary schooling years, are rare exceptions to nature. He states that if a woman is unable to marry, then she is too unattractive.

Walling concludes Part III, providing his criticism of the women's rights movements of the early 1900s and referring to women who participate in those movements as an epidemic. Walling sums up those movements as a small group of women who are unhappy with their routine household lives. He emphasizes that those movements are a political threat, stating that women should not advocate for the same rights as men. According to Walling, women cannot have the same rights as men and need to conform to their prescribed roles in order for society to function properly, otherwise those women may lose their femininity and abandon their roles as family makers. Walling further claims that women are inherently susceptible to excitement and that political ideas may cause women to wrongly view their lives with dissatisfaction. When he mentions the possibility of granting the right to vote to women, who were unable to during the early 1900s, Walling claims that the right to vote would cause women to intrude into politics, promoting, what he identifies as, child murder and unnatural repugnance to offspring. The chapter ends with Walling's list of behavioral expectations for women, including serving as a wife and mother and training their daughters to be of graceful character, and the statement that daughters should prepare for household duties, as well.

Next, in "Part IV. Masturbation, Male," Walling provides anatomical diagrams of male reproductive organs and provides medical explanations for why male masturbation is detrimental to male health. Masturbation is the touching of one's own body, specifically the genitals, for sexual pleasure. Walling states his opposition for male masturbation, explaining that sexual pleasure outside sexual intercourse would result in, what he refers to as, horrible consequences. Walling claims that male masturbation at any age, regardless of the cause, could easily lead to prolonged uncontrollable sexual desire.

Similarly, in "Part V. Masturbation, Female," Walling discusses the apparent dangers of female masturbation, which is an act that he identifies as evidence of a disorder that exists in both genders. Walling further details his belief that girls' boarding schools are dangerous, because careless administrators run those schools and overlook young girls who teach each other to masturbate.

Walling identifies some medical symptoms that he asserts are associated with masturbation, including weakness, lack of beauty, loss of color from face and lips, and lack of white teeth. Instead, Walling claims that those who engage in masturbation become pale, spiritless, and sad, and develop a dry cough and shortness of breath. Walling also claims that masturbation can cause women to develop nymphomania, or a mental disorder that is associated with hypersexuality. Also, Walling demonstrates that he opposes female same-sex romances, stating that those relationships cause girls to become depraved.

Next, in the third major section of Walling's book, he focuses on the health and wellness of men and women as they become married and have sexual intercourse, including four parts, titled "Part VI: The Rights of Offspring," "Part VII. The Physiology of Wedlock," "Part VIII. Happiness in Marriage," and "Part IX. Psycho-Physiological Comparison of the Sexes." In Part VI, Walling elaborates on his beliefs, which he claims are medically accurate, that children have a right to be born and that conception is a God-given privilege that people should not doubt. In that part, he details his moral opposition to abortion, criticizing advocates for family planning and population management through birth control. He employs religious arguments in his opposition to abortion, stating that the medical procedure constitutes as murder. Walling also asserts that women do not have a decision as to whether they want to be a mother, as motherhood is the primary duty of women.

Next, in "Part VII. The Physiology of Wedlock," Walling explains, what he refers to as, medical facts that promote marriage between men and women. He begins by describing a bride and groom who consummate their marriage. Walling describes the groom as a monster, forcing himself on the bride and beginning a cycle of continuous horror for their marriage. He explains that the information he provides in that section, though, can remedy and renew faith in one's marriage that lacks passion. Walling provides directions for men to gain their wives' trust and mend their marriages. Walling directs those men to assure their wives that they mean no violence.

Continuing in Part VII, Walling also explains some of his views of the nature of men and women. Men, he claims, are inherently oppressive toward women. He also notes that while he believes that men have a duty to respect women's emotions, women have a duty to reserve their emotions and let men initiate sexual approaches. Walling then talks about birth control, which he describes as disgusting, beastly, unnatural, and wrongful methods of preventing pregnancy. According to Walling, any form of birth control is physically dangerous for both partners, though he does not provide any evidence for that claim. When describing onanism, or non-penetrative sex, Walling notes that, like masturbation, the act may cause illness in men and women, including diseases of the brain, kidney, heart, lungs, and muscles, as well as blindness and erectile dysfunction. Additionally, according to Walling, if a woman is to engage in non-penetrative sex, then she will almost certainly develop cancer of the uterus.

In Part VII, Walling also describes various rules that men and women must follow during penetrative sex. First, Walling explains his scientific belief that contact of semen, or male reproductive fluid that contains sperm, inside the vagina is required for men and women to attain sexual pleasure. He mentions an unnamed property that explains his theory that without semen inside the vagina during arousal, the genitals do not perform their natural functions and thus injury can result. Walling next details his belief that if women engage in sexual intercourse during their menstrual periods, then there may be medical dangers, but does not explain those medical dangers. Walling then describes his beliefs about menopause, or the time at which a woman's menstrual cycle ceases as she ages. When Walling describes menopause, he claims that a woman's uterus shrinks, hardens, and loses its softness. Walling attributes high rates of cancer in older women to menopause.

Then, in "Part VIII. Happiness in Marriage," Walling details that women desire their husbands to win them in order to have a happy marriage. In that part, Walling comments on a wife's eagerness for diamond gifts from her husband, claiming that women only desire material objects. Walling argues that, during the early 1900s, young women devolved and became less polished and thus were unfavorable wives and mothers. Walling expresses his concern that younger generations used marriage to promote lust rather than a true Christian bond between a man and woman that outlasts superficial sexual attraction. Walling promotes the idea of marriage as a Christian practice that is natural for men and women, bringing them closer to God. According to Walling, citing the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, only Christian marriages are truly happy marriages.

In "Part IX. Psycho-Physiological Comparison of the Sexes," Walling compares the physical and psychological differences that he claims exist between men and women. For example, he describes physical differences among men and women, including head size, forehead depression, and torso shape. Because of women's smaller features, she is more adapt for domestic life that requires delicacy, according to Walling. He makes the claim that physical weakness of female anatomy provides evolutionary evidence that women are unfit to cope with certain life difficulties.

Continuing with that part, Walling also claims that women's brains have a more developed region toward the back of the head and a less developed region at the front of the head, providing an explanation for why he believes women show more sentiment and less reason. Walling's theory also claims that women have more cellular tissue than men, causing them to appear more curvy than men and lubricating her organs to enhance physical movement. Walling states that the abundance of cellular tissue in women is the reason that women are less advanced in personal development and destined to provide for their children. According to Walling, though women tend to live longer than men, they are usually more likely to develop health complications due to childbirth. He also states that the influence of reproduction on a woman dominates her entire existence. Walling details his theory that female reproductive organs govern the female body and states his belief that the brain connects to other organs, which are dependent on the uterus. He explains that nerves connect the womb to the heart, lungs, brain, stomach, breast, lips, and throat, so if a disease ever infected the womb, then the disease would also affect those parts of the body. He then provides arguments that in response to sensation, women tend to be more excitable than men. Men by comparison, Walling claims, can willfully suppress such sensations.

Continuing in Part IX, Walling details, what he perceives as, the differences between men and women's brains. He justifies that men have a lack of sensitivity, stating his belief that a man's brain is more dense, compared to a woman's more soft brain. Walling further claims that the anatomy of the female brain does not allow her to make observations or concentrate on one task at a time. Walling supports that claim by stating that no woman has ever created significant music or art. He states that most women are naturally not intellectual and physically inferior to males. Walling continues to evaluate anatomical differences between men and women in ways that people of the twenty-first century may view as sexist ideas.

Next, in the fourth major section of Sexology, Walling focuses on pregnancy and the care of infants, though he mentions other topics such as sterility, maladies during pregnancy, and labor. That section includes five parts, titled "Part X. Sterility," "Part XI. The Womb and its Appendages," "Part XII. Pregnancy. Its Symptoms," "Part XIII. Maladies During Pregnancy," and "Part XIV. Labor. Occupation Of The Mother During Pregnancy." First, in Part X, Walling defines sterility as when an individual is unable to reproduce. However, Walling specifies that people only use the terms to refer to women who are unable to become pregnant, claiming that that male sterility is extremely rare. Walling attributes sterility in young married couples to hypersexuality, though he provides no evidence for that claim. According to Walling, women may also be naturally sterile, if an egg cell escapes the womb.

In "Part XI. The Womb and its Appendages," Walling details the anatomy of the womb as it relates to human reproduction. He provides an anatomical diagram of female reproductive organs, as well as descriptions of body dimensions and brief definitions of terms for displacements of the womb. Walling claims that women who develop in warm climates, live in cities, read romance novels, or have discussions about romantic topics are more likely to begin puberty at a younger age than normal. Walling details his understanding of the processes of puberty, the menstrual cycle, or the process that prepares the female body for pregnancy, and conception.

Next, in "Part XII. Pregnancy. Its Symptoms," Walling details the expectations and common symptoms of pregnancy. According to Walling, lack of menstrual periods, excessive gas, the presence of milk in the breasts, and morning sickness are the main symptoms of pregnancy. He outlines the stages of pregnancy in two-month increments, and lists common symptoms at each stage, including breast tenderness and vomiting. Walling also advises pregnant women to not run, jump, ride horses, dance, or submerge themselves in cold water, as well as avoid crowds, heated rooms, and excitement. Walling then addresses any worries of dangers and difficulties in bearing children, reassuring women that if they do not have any physical abnormalities, then they are able to bear

children.

In “Part XIII. Maladies During Pregnancy,” Walling describes mental diseases that, according to him, can affect a woman’s pregnancy. Walling advises husbands whose pregnant wives suffer from mental illnesses during pregnancy to help calm their wives. He provides examples of things that husbands can do to help their pregnant wives, such as going on leisurely walks and bringing home visitors like friends and family.

Lastly, in “Part XIV. Labor. Occupation Of The Mother During Pregnancy,” Walling describes the necessary preparations for pregnant women during labor and childbirth. He provides a list of supplies that the mother should have before she gives birth, including cotton night dresses, bandages, napkins, face towels, bedroom slippers, diapers, a baby basket, soap, and powder. Walling then makes the claim that women prefer to have men deliver their children rather than a female, because women tend to feel safer with men and can rely on their courage during labor. He then details that pregnant women must prepare for childbirth and have warm water, a sponge, and lubrication oil in the birthing room.

Walling published *Sexology* in 1904, but in a later reprint, the front pages of the book contained several endorsements from people who held prominent positions in medicine, academia, religion, and government. The endorsements demonstrate that many people supported and appreciated the book, at the time of its publication, including Frederick Hamilton, who served as the president of Tufts University in Boston, Massachusetts. In his endorsement, Hamilton notes that every parent should own a copy of *Sexology*.

However, Walling made several claims that, as of the twenty-first century, some people may consider to be sexist and oppressive toward women. For example, in *Sexology*, Walling repeatedly stresses the importance of preserving femininity and traditional gender roles, claiming that women would devolve if they were to become involved in academics or politics. Despite that warning, throughout the twentieth century, women in the US continued to advocate for equal rights, eventually earning the right to vote and become politically active in 1920. Also, the Boston Women’s Health Collective, formed in Boston, Massachusetts, during the 1960s, helped educate and spread accurate information about women’s health.

As of 2021, many experts have disproved the claims that Walling makes throughout *Sexology*. For example, although Walling states that the uterus shrinks during menopause, the Mayo Clinic, a medical research center, states that menopause is the natural decline of the hormones in the female body that cause the menstrual cycle and does not impact the size of the uterus. Also, Walling describes birth control methods as dangerous to the health of both women and men, but as of 2021, reproductive health organization Planned Parenthood asserts that birth control methods are safe and effective ways to prevent pregnancy and promote health. For example, condoms, which are barriers that prevent male reproductive fluid from entering the female body, help to decrease the risk of sexually-transmitted infections that are spread through contact with bodily fluids. Also, the birth control pill, which is comprised of a synthetic version of the hormone estrogen, can ease the cramps during menstrual periods.

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