



## The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology)

By Rachel P. Maines

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From the time of Hippocrates until the 1920s, massaging female patients to orgasm was a staple of medical practice among Western physicians in the treatment of "hysteria," an ailment once considered both common and chronic in women. Doctors loathed this time-consuming procedure and for centuries relied on midwives. Later, they substituted the efficiency of mechanical devices, including the electric vibrator, invented in the 1880s. In *The Technology of Orgasm*, Rachel Maines offers readers a stimulating, surprising, and often humorous account of hysteria and its treatment throughout the ages, focusing on the development, use, and fall into disrepute of the vibrator as a legitimate medical device.

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## **Editorial Review**

### *Amazon.com Review*

For centuries, women diagnosed with "hysteria"--a "disease paradigm," in Rachel P. Maines's felicitous phrase, thought to result from a lack of sexual intercourse or gratification--were treated by massaging their genitals in order to induce "paroxysm." Male physicians, however, considered the practice drudgery, and sought various ways of avoiding the task, often foisting it off on midwives or, starting in the late 19th century, employing mechanical devices. Eventually, these devices became available for purchase and home use; one such "portable vibrator" is advertised in the 1918 Sears, Roebuck catalog as an "aid that every woman appreciates." *The Technology of Orgasm* is an impeccably researched history that combines a discussion of hysteria in the Western medical tradition with a detailed examination (including several illustrations) of the devices used to "treat" the "condition." (Maines is somewhat dismissive of the contemporary, phallus-shaped models, which she describes as "underpowered battery-operated toys," insisting that "it is the AC-powered vibrator with at least one working surface at a right angle to the handle that is best designed for application to the clitoral area.") Don't expect any cheap thrills, though; the titillation Maines offers is strictly intellectual. --Ron Hogan

### *From Publishers Weekly*

It will surprise most readers to learn that the vibrator was invented in the late 1880s as a time-saving device for physicians, who had been treating women's "hysteria" for years with clitoral massage. Denying the sexual nature of the treatments, doctors instead saw the technique as a burdensome chore and welcomed electric devices that would shorten patients' visits. Maines, an independent scholar in the history of technology, presents a straightforward account of the mechanism from its beginning through the 1920s, when it came into disrepute as a medical instrument. Going far beyond a mere summary of therapeutic advances, however, she wryly chronicles the attitude toward women's sexuality in the medical and psychological professions and shows, with searing insight, how some ancient biases are still prevalent in our society. Maines's writing is lively and entertaining, and her research is exhaustive, drawing on texts from Hippocrates to the present day. Proving her point about how women's sexuality is still perceived as an unapproachable subject in some quarters, Maines describes her travails in vibrator historiography, including the loss of her teaching position at Clarkson University. A pioneering and important book, this window into social and technological history also provides a marvelously clear view of contemporary ideas about women's sexuality. Copyright 1998 Reed Business Information, Inc.

### *From Library Journal*

A researcher and archivist with a doctorate in the history of technology, Maines has produced an exhaustive and deliciously savage history of the vibrator-as-sex-aid. Massage of women's genitalia by physicians for relief of "hysteria" dates to Hippocrates. Yet procuring women's orgasms?whether identified as sex or as merely "paroxysm"?was "the job that nobody wanted," and physicians were happy to delegate the chore to mechanical devices in the 1880s. This fascinating and exquisitely referenced true story reads like twisted science fiction and will intrigue historians of technology and/or medicine, culture-watchers, feminists, and lay readers. Maines's work is noted briefly in Joani Blank's *Good Vibrations (Down There, 1989)*, a concise and helpful popular introduction to vibrators and how to use them. Hoag Levins's journalistic *American Sex Machines* (Adams Media, 1996) bypasses vibrator evolution and history completely. Maines's dry wit and writing skill lend appeal and readability. Highly recommended for academic and public libraries.?Martha Cornog, Philadelphia Copyright 1999 Reed Business Information, Inc.

## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

#### **Alfred Zoeller:**

This The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology) book is not really ordinary book, you have it then the world is in your hands. The benefit you have by reading this book is definitely information inside this book incredible fresh, you will get information which is getting deeper you actually read a lot of information you will get. This specific The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology) without we know teach the one who looking at it become critical in thinking and analyzing. Don't always be worry The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology) can bring when you are and not make your bag space or bookshelves' turn out to be full because you can have it inside your lovely laptop even telephone. This The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology) having excellent arrangement in word and layout, so you will not really feel uninterested in reading.

#### **Harold Graham:**

Playing with family within a park, coming to see the sea world or hanging out with friends is thing that usually you might have done when you have spare time, subsequently why you don't try point that really opposite from that. One activity that make you not sensation tired but still relaxing, trilling like on roller coaster you already been ride on and with addition info. Even you love The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology), you are able to enjoy both. It is great combination right, you still want to miss it? What kind of hangout type is it? Oh come on its mind hangout people. What? Still don't get it, oh come on its identified as reading friends.

#### **Harold Bunch:**

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#### **Eric Kyler:**

As a pupil exactly feel bored to be able to reading. If their teacher asked them to go to the library in order to

make summary for some book, they are complained. Just small students that has reading's internal or real their interest. They just do what the professor want, like asked to go to the library. They go to right now there but nothing reading very seriously. Any students feel that studying is not important, boring and also can't see colorful pictures on there. Yeah, it is being complicated. Book is very important in your case. As we know that on this age, many ways to get whatever you want. Likewise word says, many ways to reach Chinese's country. Therefore this The Technology of Orgasm: "Hysteria," the Vibrator, and Women's Sexual Satisfaction (Johns Hopkins Studies in the History of Technology) can make you feel more interested to read.

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