Sexology by William Henry Walling

By: Horowitz, Rainey Keywords: Female hysteria, women's health, Hypersexuality

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 a historical medical perspective for the topic of reproductive medicine at the turn of the twentieth century.

In 1836, William Henry Walling was born in Smithfield, 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 the State of Pennsylvania. 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, which provides context on the state of reproductive medicine and relationship psychology during the early 1900s. During that time, abortion, pregnancy, labor, and marriage. In the introduction section, called “Part 1: Introduction,” Walling claims that before he wrote his book, his friends, physicians, and daily papers and journals mislabeled 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 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 who desired sexual satisfaction.

Part IV, “Masturbation, Male,” Part VI, “Masturbation, Female,” 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 abortion 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.

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.

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Next, in “Part IV. Masturbation, Male,” Walling provides anatomical diagrams female 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[6] would result in, what he refers to as, horrid 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 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 or negative consequences from female masturbation, including disorders 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 symptoms, 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 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 overly 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 claims 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[1] are not perpetuating their race with strong and healthy women. Rather, Walling claims that humans[2] are unnaturally devolving. Thus, he explains that preservation of humans[3] 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 education[4], stating that those experiences are incompatible with femininity. In that part, Walling also elaborates further on gender expectations of women. He claims that women who engage in fashion and appearance that are not feminine. 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.

Continuing 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 as a wife and mother...
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 reproductive organs to 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.

Sources


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Subject


Topic

Publications [46]

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