It’s 1883.

Thomas Edison first incandescent lamp was invented in 1879, and his first screw-in bulb was discovered in 1880.

Electricity is on the minds of many, including physicians of the time.

At this time, female sexuality was relegated to the world of pathology and the female orgasm was referred to as a “crisis of disease.”

Sexuality existed around the androcentric model, a model which places male human beings or a masculine point of view, at the center of a culture or history, meaning that sex was viewed from the perspective of the male in a heterosexual relationship. As you might imagine, this androcentrism did not adequately represent the experience of women. In fact, sexuality from the androcentric view believed that a “normal” female should be able to achieve orgasm through penetration and should she not experience orgasm solely through the act of penetration, then she was “frigid.” This perceived frigidity was though to bring about “hysteria,” a disease resulting from lack of sex or sexual gratification.

Women of this time were often brought to physicians such as *The Vibrator Play*’s Dr. Givings to relieve them of their hysteria, anxiety or sadness. Before the dawn of electricity, the treatment was administered by hand, but upon the ability to “plug in,” physicians moved from their hands or hand-powered machines, to electric vibrators to treat women in “distress.” And “hallelujah,” was the proclamation of many a doctor, I imagine, as they no longer had to fatigue themselves or “waste time” tending to the sometimes illusive satisfaction of women in treatment. Even in serving the female patient, the male doctor’s time and exhaustion level were of central concern.

But is it possible that a machine can satisfy a woman in ways that a man can’t? Can electricity bring a woman what she desires? Or is there something else? Something more earth shaking than the most powerful paroxysm? Might there be another model – other than the androcentric one so many had grown to accept – to suggests that women need more? That the female perspective might be equal to that of a male? And what – oh what?? – happens if we completely unplug, remove all of the distractions and just find pleasure in another person in a free and equal exploration?

Moving towards such a new model brings about a new vulnerability – no longer is the male point of view the centerpiece. It must share its position with the point of view of the female. If you’ve never experienced that sort of sharing of power … how terrifying. If you have never been given that central position … how terrifying. But often that which terrifies us the most is accompanied by the greatest reward.

Many of us can look through the lens of history and see that we have, in fact, moved forward – it’s undeniable, really. But have we reached the destination? Is androcentrism completely in our rearview? Or does it still move alongside of us as we roll ever forward?

It should be noted that hysteria, as it is addressed within *In The Next Room, Or The Vibrator Play* was not removed from the American Psychiatric Association’s Canon of Modern Disease Paradigms until 1952.

“The female orgasm ‘inspires interest, debate, polemics, ideology, technical manuals and scientific and popular literature solely because it is so often absent’ unlike ‘the male orgasm, which exists with monotonous regularity and for the most part is interesting only to people directly involved in one.’” – From *The Technology of Orgasm* by Rachel P. Maines quoting Donald Symons from the 1979 Evolution of Human Sexuality

"When a guy's ambitious and out in the public arena and working hard well that’s OK, but when a woman suddenly does it, suddenly you’re all like – well why’s she doing that?" – President Barack Obama, 2016