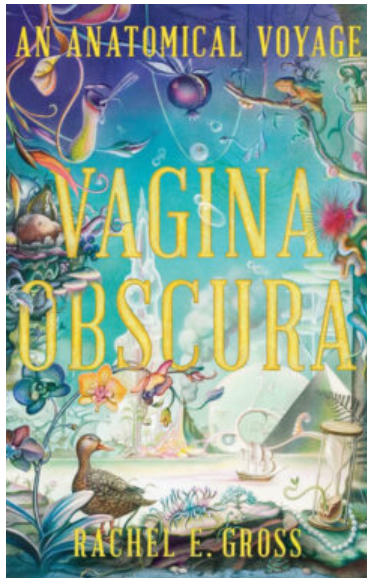


## ‘Vagina Obscura’ reveals how little is understood about woman biology



Vagina Obscura  
*Rachel E. Gross*  
W.W. Norton & Co., \$30

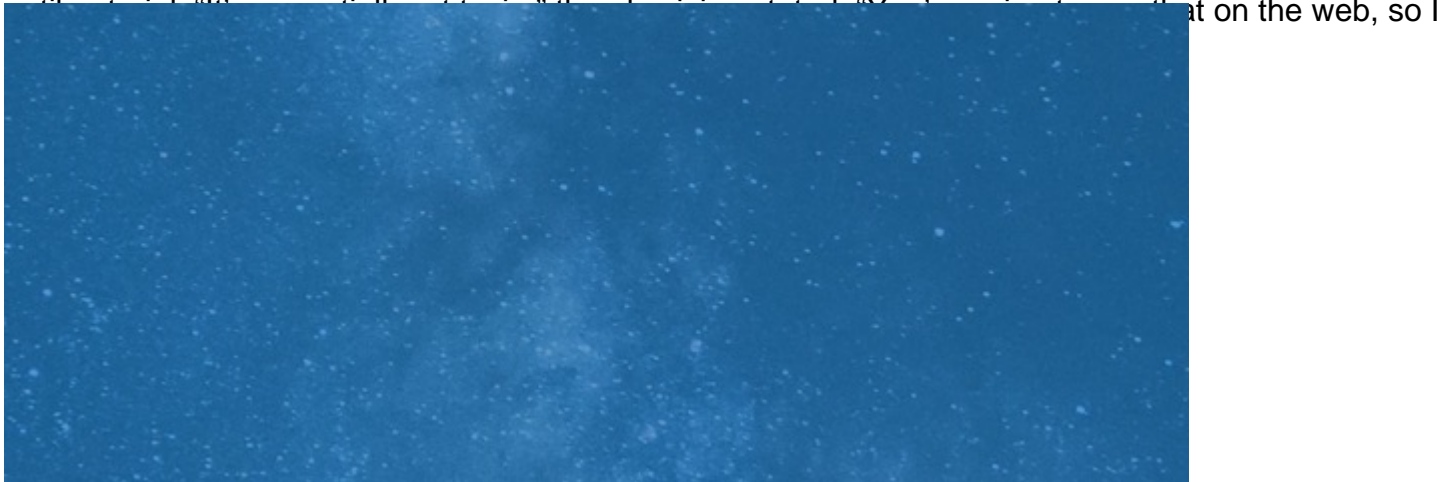
More than 2,000 years ago, Hippocrates, the Greek doctor typically thought of as the father of contemporary medicine, determined what came to be understood as the clitoris, a “little pillar” of erectile tissue near the vaginal area’s entryway. Aristotle then saw that the relatively little structure was associated to sexual satisfaction.

Yet it wasn’t till 2005 that urologist Helen O’Connell exposed that the “little pillar” was simply the tip of the iceberg. The internal parts of the organ reach around the vaginal area and go into the pelvis, extending a network of nerves much deeper than anatomists ever understood.

It took centuries to reveal the clitoris's real degree since sexism has long stymied the research study of woman biology, science reporter Rachel E. Gross argues in her brand-new book, *Vagina Obscura*. Esteemed guys of science, from Charles Darwin to Sigmund Freud, seen guys as exceptional to females. To be male was to be the suitable requirement. To be female was to be a stunted variation of a human. The vaginal area, the ancient Greeks concluded, was simply a penis turned inside out, the ovaries just interior testicles.

Because males mainly thought about females's bodies for their reproductive abilities and interactions with penises, just just recently have scientists started to really comprehend the complete scope of woman organs and tissues, Gross programs. That consists of the standard biology of what "healthy" looks like in these parts of the body and their impacts on the body as a entire.

*Vagina Obscura* itself was born out of Gross' disappointment at not understanding her own body in the wake of a vaginal infection. After prescription antibiotics and antifungal treatments stopped working due to a misdiagnosis, her gynecologist recommended another treatment. As Gross paraphrases, the medical professional informed her to "shove rat toxin up my vaginal area." The infection, it turned out, was bacterial vaginosis, a hard-to-treat, often scratchy and agonizing condition triggered by an overgrowth of germs that generally live in the vaginal area. (The rat toxin was boric acid, which is likewise an



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The book's expedition of woman anatomy starts from the outside in, very first passing through the clitoris's nerve-filled external nub to the vaginal area, ovaries and uterus. The last chapter focuses on gender affirmation surgical treatment, detailing how doctors have actually changed the field for transgender individuals. (Gross is up-front that words such as *women* and *men* produce a synthetic binary, with apparently more goal terms like "male" and "female" not carrying out much much better in incorporating humankind's variety, consisting of intersex and transgender individuals.)

Throughout this trip, Gross doesn't shy away from facing the sexism and bias behind questionable concepts about woman biology, such as vaginal orgasms (versus coming from the clitoris) and the presence of the G-spot (SN: 4/25/12). Both "near-mystical" ideas stem from the male viewpoint that sexual satisfaction need to be simple for females, if just males might hit the right area. Nor are the more terrible offenses swept under the carpet, consisting of bigotry, eugenics and woman genital cutting. Footnotes throughout the book information Gross' efforts to browse questionable views and stigmatizing or culturally charged terms.

To lift readers' spirits, she discovers the right areas to provide a dosage of wry humor or a pun. She likewise shares stories of frequently forgotten scientists, such as laboratory professional Miriam Menkin, who revealed in 1944 that in vitro fertilization is possible (SN: 8/12/44). Yet Menkin's function in explaining the very first circumstances of a human egg being fertilized in a laboratory meal has mainly been removed from IVF's history (SN: 6/9/21). There's likewise plenty of chance to marvel at the power of the woman body. Despite the long-held idea that an individual is born with all the eggs they'll ever have, for example, scientists are now finding the ovary's regenerative homes.

Studying woman bodies more carefully might eventually enhance quality of life. Chasing cells capable of producing more eggs may bring about discoveries that might bring back the menstrual cycle in cancer clients rendered sterile by chemotherapy or make menopause less unpleasant. Patients with endometriosis, a agonizing condition in which uterine tissue grows outside the uterus, are typically dismissed and their signs minimized. Some medical professionals even suggest getting pregnant to prevent the discomfort. But individuals shouldn't have to suffer simply because they aren't pregnant. Researchers simply haven't asked the right concerns yet about the uterus or endometriosis, Gross argues.

*Vagina Obscura* enhances that woman bodies are more than "walking wombs" or "baby devices." Understanding these organs and tissues is essential for keeping the individuals who have them healthy. It will take a lot of vaginal area research studies to conquer centuries of overlook, Gross composes. But the book supplies a glance into what is possible when scientists (finally) pay attention.

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