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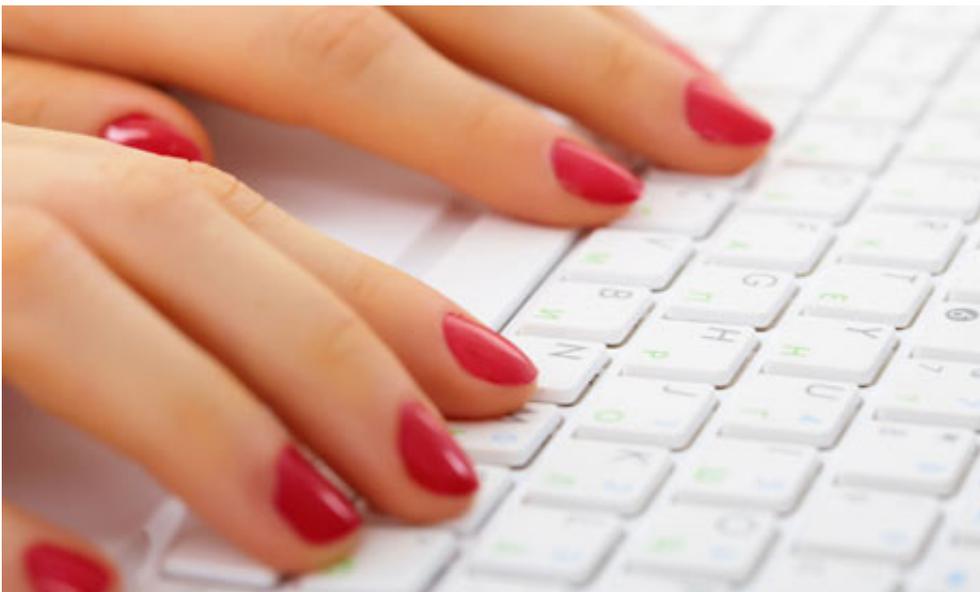
# Why women are writing about sex - without shame

The UK's first conference for sex writers reflects a surge in confessional blogs and the rise of 'clit lit'. And as sex writing goes mainstream, some women are even ditching their pseudonyms, says Helen Croydon

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Helen Croydon  
guardian.co.uk, Tuesday 6 March 2012 11.24 GMT

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Sex writing: 'It's not about exposure, it's about expression.' Photograph: pzAxe/Alamy

Bloggers, memoirists, novelists, short story writers, poets and publishers filled a conference centre in Bristol on Saturday, talking about creative energy, censorship, cache plug-ins, Google indexing, pen names ... and words for penetration. The common thread was sex.

Eroticon 2012 was the UK's first ever conference for sex writers, reflecting the explosion over the last decade in promulgating one's personal life. First came the book version of Belle de Jour's blog in 2005, then the Girl with a One Track Mind book a year later. Together they seemed to spur a publishing craze for sex confessionals. That led to emulation blogs in their thousands, mostly by women. Now almost every newspaper and magazine has some sort of single girl column, airing phases of her love life.

It isn't just first-person narratives. So-called 'clit lit' - saucy fiction for women - is on the up, especially in the e-world. Mills and Boon says its electronic downloads doubled in 2010, and in the past few years mainstream publishers such as Random House, Penguin and Simon & Schuster have all inaugurated erotica imprints.

What caused this appetite for over-sharing? Have women suddenly, mysteriously become more libidinous? Is it that delving into that forbidden part of the imagination is extra cathartic for writers? Or has it just become cool? It wasn't so long ago that Lady Chatterley's Lover was being burned by a horrified public. As recently as 2002, the explicit scenes in The Sexual Life of Catherine M ruffled many feathers.

Zoe Margolis, the blogger behind Girl with a One Track Mind, was one of Saturday's speakers. "It's not about exposure, it's about expression," she said. "Writing helps place your thoughts. You can't ignore the technology available today and where we are in self-publishing. We are in a certain period of expression. People have seen that you can have a wonderful catharsis in getting your views and experiences out. Plus, there is a desire to read it. Women are embracing that. They are finding a platform that isn't available in mainstream media."

Sex blogger doesn't have to mean sex confessor. For many, it's about erotic prose or reviews. Jill Boyd, 21, is a virgin and uses her blog to track her sexual development. "Starting a blog was my way of understanding the sex world," she said. "At one point I got into porn and masturbation and I wrote about my feelings to understand it. Then I started to write fiction and now I've been published in an anthology by Naughty Nights Press."

The Exotic Lady publishes short stories: "I have three different blogs but I enjoy the erotic fiction best because it's more interactive. People are more vocal about whether they think it's good or not. I get far more comments and feedback on my writing. On Twitter I see more and more sex bloggers. That isn't a bad thing. If more people are doing it, it proves to the industry that we are viable."

This idea of quashing taboo was a common one at Eroticon. But if sex writers are so

intent on this, why do so few use their real names? Last year my first book was published, *Sugar Daddy Diaries*, a confessional memoir of my penchant for older men. I had planned to use a pseudonym but by the time publication came around, I felt comfortable enough about my subject matter that I was proud to use my real name. I expected and wanted to be judged by my work, not by the activities I wrote about.

For others, it isn't so simple. Vina Green is a guest writer for [sacredpleasures.co.uk](http://sacredpleasures.co.uk), and that's her pen name. "I work in sales so my image to the public needs to be a blank canvas," she said. "While I might be comfortable knowing things about [clients'] personal tastes, they may want a totally conservative relationship with me. If they knew I wrote about my sex life I could be a threat to them, or I could be seen to be a publicity threat to my company."

'Faerie' describes himself as a male sexual pioneer. He hosts a BDSM blog under his pseudonym. "I'm open about what I do in every context except my family and my bank," he explains.

Monique Roffey is author of *With the kisses of his mouth*, a memoir of her sexual conquests to mend her broken heart. Already an established novelist, she says it was a big move to make herself the story. "It's about time that women who write about sex nail their flag to the mast and say 'I'm going to put my name to it'. It's important to put to the mainstream public that, 'Hey, I've got no shame about this. This is all true. This is me.' It occludes the taboo if you do."

In France, it is common for a prize-winning literary author to occasionally write a book about sex, and those books are reviewed very seriously. In Britain, associations with erotica or sex confessionals linger dangerously close to smut. Margolis, who was famously ousted by a Sunday newspaper, knows a lot about this.

"I chose to use a pseudonym because I feared judgement", she said. "I felt more empowered when I was anonymous because I was unrestrained. I miss that, but the flipside is that now I have a platform to talk publicly about sexual attitudes and hopefully I can help change things. I've received thousands of messages over the years from women saying 'Me too! I felt the same!' I'm nothing extraordinary whatsoever, I just spoke louder than other people. It's lovely to see so many women writing about sex. In 2004 an event like this simply could not have happened."

• *Helen Croydon is the author of *Sugar Daddy Diaries* and *100 Lessons on Sex*.*

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