



Best Sex Writing 2013: The State of Today's Sexual Culture

Rachel Kramer Bussel (Editor), Carol Queen (Foreword), Jon Pressick (Contributor), Lori Selke (Contributor), Insiya Ansari (Contributor), Patrick Califia-Rice (Contributor), Melissa Gira Grant (Contributor), Rob Boston (Contributor), more... Dennis Romero (Contributor), Kristen Hinman (Contributor), Jonathan Lethem (Contributor), Neil Gabler (Contributor), Andy Isaacson (Contributor), Rachel Swan (Contributor), Alex Morris (Contributor), Seth Fischer (Contributor), Conner Habib (Contributor), Nicholas Garnett (Contributor), Julia Serano (Contributor), Madison Young (Contributor)
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The *Best Sex Writing* series has fundamentally changed the way people think—and what they say—about sexuality. Once again, Rachel Kramer Bussel has collected the year's most challenging and provocative nonfiction articles on this endlessly evocative subject. The essays here comprise a detailed, direct survey of the contemporary American sexual landscape. Major commentators examine the many roles sex plays in our lives in these literate and lively essays. Judged by the Dr. Carol Queen, who is without peer, this stunning collection of sexsmart essays is sure to stir the heart, the brain, as well as other major organs.

Best Sex Writing 2013: The State of Today's Sexual Culture Details

Date : Published April 16th 2013 by Cleis Press (first published January 1st 2013)

ISBN : 9781573448994

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Format : Paperback 212 pages

Genre : Sexuality, Nonfiction, Adult Fiction, Erotica, Anthologies, Writing, Essays, LGBT, Transgender

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From Reader Review Best Sex Writing 2013: The State of Today's Sexual Culture for online ebook

Jennifer says

This book totally channeled Susie Bright, as a collection of reporting on topics of sexuality. Of course there were the requisite essays on polyandry and s&m but there was a very interesting article that posits that all the hype about sexually exploited girls is bunk. The argument goes that one research study in NY found that half of minors in sex work were found to be boys and the majority of both boys and girls were selling sex on their own without pimps in order to support themselves. Hm. I'd love some follow-up study to see if those trends run true today and in all parts of the US. Ha, in any case the cover may be misleading as to suggest erotic fiction.

? BookAddict ✍ La Crimson Femme says

This is filled with opinions and editorials rather than fictional erotic stories. Although some of these are questionable in their facts. My review is going to be a bit different than usual. These are my own opinions based on these sexually charged articles. I'm dividing them up into how I felt about each chapter. Instead of listing the best first, I'm going to start with the articles that enjoyed and end with ones I thought were best. I'm going to stick the ones I loathed in the middle so that people will forget they even existed.

Good Vibrations

There are two in here which I read and just felt good while reading them. The book kicks off with *Live Nude Models* by Jonathan Lethem. It's a sweet trip down memory lane for the writer who started early on as an artist. *Oh Baby! Baby Talk* by Rachel Kramer Bussel deals with a much disparaged ageplay fetish. Since I adore ageplay, I appreciated this one. Ms. Bussel, will you my Mommy?

Much to do about nothing

Holy Fuck: The Fourth-and-Long Virgin by Jon Pressick just makes me shake my head. I agree with Mr. Pressick. Tim Tebow is an athlete who is a virgin. So what? Mr. Pressick makes good points about the sexual expectations of a star athlete. When did we become a society where hypocrisy is the acceptable norm? We don't want people telling us what to do yet we want to force our stereotypes upon others. Really, who the fuck cares if Tebow is a virgin? People with too much time on their hands.

Why is this illegal?

These two stories probably lead me down the path of damnation. In *Rest Stop Confidential* by Conner Habib, it exposes the allure of anonymous sex in public men's restrooms. I never understood the problem with having sex in a bathroom. What's the issue here again? It's not like the men are exchanging money. Okay, I get that we shouldn't push "our" kinks upon others in public. I guess I wonder why people are riveted watching animals having sex at the zoo yet we can't have sex in public restrooms. Not that I would want to have sex in a public bathroom, because they are filthy germ ridden and potentially spider infested nastiness rooms.

The second one which makes me scratch my head is *Happy Hookers* by Melissa Gira Grant. This essay is all about the "oldest professional" in the world. Why is this still illegal? I never understood why it's bad to pay for sex.

Poly good, bad and ugly

These two essays deal with poly relationships. *Sex by Numbers* by Rachel Swan shows a working poly formation with ups and downs. It's not perfect, but it's possible. *When on Fire Island A Polyamorous Disaster* by Nicholas Garnett is not a flattering look at a married couple who try out swinging. It's a train wreck which is uncomfortable to witness even second or third hand.

I hear you

These are ones which are just okay for me. I felt nothing. There were a couple of good points. Such as *Porn defends the money shot* by Dennis Romero. This is the argument as to why condoms aren't used in porn flicks. The porn addicts paying for it don't want to see the love glove. With an abundance of free porn through internet, it's difficult to sell porn with actors using prophylactics.

Very legal: sex and love in retirement by Alex Morris enlightens me on grandma sex and why they don't get hitched again. Not too applicable for me now, but good to note when I'm old, alone and in a nursing home. *Cherry Picking* by Julia Serano is a little boy coming of age story as he turns into a sexually aware young lady. It's sweet.

Oddly enough, even though I'm submissive, *Submissive a personal manifesto* by Madison Young was just okay for me. I understand her different roles. The ending just seemed over the top.

Fail

If I went by the lowest ratings, this collection would be a 1 star based on these two articles. *Sex by Any Other Name* by Insiya Ansari can be summed up in one word - Cocktease. I didn't care for this one at all. The girl comes across pretentious.

Christian Conservatives vs. Sex The Long War over reproductive freedom by Rob Boston is a total fail for me. Here are some points which I'd like to have taken into consideration.

Arizona's House Bill 2625 was a response to Obama mandating there should be no co-pay for women at all when it comes to birth control. Arizona seems to have a knee jerk response against Obama and based upon Obama's constant opposition with them, it's not a surprise. Early on, Arizona made some legislations which they felt makes sense for their state. It's the United States of America. Depending on a person's personal leanings, they may agree with a Federal versus State legislation. However, each state is different and can have different needs. When Arizona was called out early on during the first term, this riled them up. Seriously, where is the common sense? You try to bully or bash a person or entity in the public, what would their response be? Once, they get miffed. More than twice, they now consider you an enemy. Ever cross a person before? They will hold a grudge and next time you have something important, they'll block it just for the sake of blocking. This is basic negotiation class 101 material.

Second, the law does NOT say women can't have contraceptives. Somehow the article devolves into women dying of abortion because conservative Christians aren't letting women get free contraceptives. So, contraceptives are no longer going to be made? The Pill and other contraception will now be illegal? Do the pharmaceutical companies know this? Do the manufactures know this? What the bill is saying, is employers are not forced to keep it as something they must cover. It gives employers the choice to opt out of covering for it. Women and men can still buy it and pay for it themselves.

"Boo hoo hoo! The drugs costs too much! The mean company I work for SHOULD pay for it. It's my constitutional right." Let me get this straight, my premium now needs to go up due to a service I don't use, because you want it for free? There's something called free will. If your employer doesn't cover it and it's a big deal for you, find a new employer. Or better yet, let's ask the real question no one seems to be asking. This is the one which I find interestingly suppressed.

The problem is, the cost of the different birth control pills and devices are so expensive. Why? If the issue is that the drugs are not affordable, let's determine the cause. Is it a monopoly? Is it a collusion? Why blame employers? Let's look at the root of the problem - the drug companies selling it at these so called unaffordable prices. Or is it the insurance companies. Do we even know how much this costs?

As a last thought on this one. Is Viagra covered? If it is, then I can just as easily make the supposition that these lawmakers are really against women's equality for allowing Viagra or any sexual enhancing drug to be covered for free or co-pay. Because this means heterosexual males using this will be sexing up their females which results in pregnancy. It's clear the purpose of covering Viagra is oppression of women through getting them knocked up. Women will be stuck at home pumping out kids and squirting out milk to feed them. This is just as ludicrous as equating allowing employers to opt out resulting in women dying from using hangers to scrape out a baby they don't want.

Slit my wrists now

These articles just depressed me. They are moving and one can feel the pain emanating off the pages. The title *Ghosts: All my men are dead* by Carol Queen says it all. *Lost boys* by Kristen Hinman is a deeper look at young boys selling their bodies for various reasons. *Dear John* by Lori Selke is just sad. The divergence between her kinky style and the current Leatherman culture is just depressing.

Notes from a Unicorn by Seth Fischer hits home for me. His struggle is aggravating because I find it's unnecessary to force people into roles and labels. His experience is heartbreaking. I think bi-sexual males are worse off than bi-sexual females.

The Original Blonde by Neal Gabler is a lovely tribute to Jean Harlow. It's also a tragic look at the rise and fall of a young sassy woman. In ten years, she lived a live more drama ridden than most people who live twice her age.

Thought Provoking

There are several articles which I found myself musing over for days after reading it. I want my friends to read this book so I can discuss these particular ones with them. *Can a better vibrator inspire an Age of Great American Sex?* by Andy Isaacson falls into this category. This article makes good points about removing the stigma of with selling and buying sexual aids. With vibrators moving into stores other than dingy back alley sex stores, it's no longer a dirty secret. Having spent several hundreds of dollars on different sex toys, I can agree that better vibrators will inspire greater American sex. My orgasms have shown great improvement with my purchase.

Enhancing Masochism: How to Expand Limits and Increase Desire by Patrick Califia is by far, the best one for me. 5 star material all the way. He spends time distinguishing between abuse and non-abuse.

Is there any objective proof that people who get wet during a spanking are also getting ripped off financially, intimidated by bullies, anorexic, being battered, or likely to engage in self-mutilation? No. And there never will be, because we are conflating two separate categories of human experience. One is a sexual identity or experience; the other is a state of disenfranchisement, oppression, traumatization or self-hatred. People consent to the former; they wish they could escape the latter(p. 119).

The one which captures my submissive essence is Mr. Califia's point below.

The submissive wants to be possessed and yield to another person; they want to be of service. They will take pain if you make it their job to take it. The pain becomes one item on a menu of conduct or sacrifices that you, the master or mistress, demand because it pleases you. Pain becomes a way to demonstrate your control over him or her (p. 119).

This collection of writings is for kinky readers who want a book they can think about and discuss with others.

**provided by BDSM Book Reviews*

Jennifer says

Amazing how dated this feels, even though 2013 was only four years ago. (Does anyone care about Tim Tebow anymore? I was particularly taken aback by the *super-progressive* polyamorous guy who dropped the word "tranny" like it was nothing. And did you know lots of Americans buy vibrators? Shocking!)

Some of the personally essays were better than the more "investigative" pieces. But overall, if this represented the best, I'd hate to see the worst.

TammyJo Eckhart says

20 essays that fall into the genres of historical essay, political treatise, business trends, discussions of formal research, how-to text, biography and autobiography. The most numerous are the autobiographies usually focused no a specific period of time in the author's life or combined with political or historical explanations.

The topics range from crime to marriage to sexual orientation and kink so there is likely to be 1-2 essays of personal interest to any reader. For those of us who like to keep up on the state of current thoughts and social ideas on human sexuality, this is good way to catch up on articles we may have missed.

I wish I knew how the essays were chosen but that isn't addressed in the book. Most of the authors are American (based on biographies in the back) and all are in English so I'd be thrilled to know how they were selected.

Steve Isaak says

Overall review:

Best Sex Writing 2013 is a choice anthology of essays centered around the current vibe of our Western culture, carnal and (sometimes) beyond it. This is one of my favorite anthologies Bussel has edited, as well as one of my all-time favorite sexual anthologies, for its scope and (mostly) bullstuff-free take on what's going on in our world.

Only one of the essays didn't grab me because it was long-winded (Jonathan Lethem's "Live Nude Models"). Lethem's verbiage was occasionally clever, but ultimately not worthy of his essay's supposed pay-offs.

Lethem's work aside, this is an exceptional collection of works - one worth owning.

Standout essays:

- 1.) "Sex By Numbers" - Rachel Swan: Excellent piece about polyamorous relationships.
- 2.) "Very Legal: Sex and Love in Retirement" - Alex Morris: The title says it all. Especially good read.
- 3.) "Notes From a Unicorn" - Seth Fischer: A bisexual man details his evolution as a person and a sexual being. Emotionally engaging, exceptional essay.
- 4.) "Rest Stop Confidential" - Conner Habib: The mindset of rest stop cruising is explored.
- 5.) "When on Fire Island. . . A Polyamorous Disaster" - Nicholas Garnett: The joys and pitfalls of polyamory play out in affecting and tragic fashion. One of the best entries in this collection.
- 6.) "Cherry Picking" - Julia Serano: Wonderful, thoughtful piece about a transgender woman and her series of sexualized "firsts".
- 7.) "Baby Talk" - Rachel Kramer Bussel: A lover's predilection for 'age play' leads the author to consider her own predilections, carnal and otherwise.
- 8.) "Dear John" - Lori Selke: A woman parts ways with the traditional power dynamics of leather culture.
- 9.) "Christian Conservatives vs. Sex: The Long War Over Reproductive Freedom" - Rob Boston: The author outlines the history of birth control and religious/political interference; more importantly, he tells why we, as advanced cultures, must fight to defend our reproductive rights. Excellent, a must-read entry.
- 10.) "Porn Defends the Money Shot" - Dennis Romero: Another exemplary essay. In a shifting world, porndom finds itself having to change - or else face a tumbledown in their revenue streams.
- 11.) "Lost Boys" - Kristen Hinman: Overblown governmental budgets, social denial, corruption and other factors - some of them surprising - contribute to the misreporting and exacerbation of underage prostitution across the United States. Illuminating call-to-action, this - and easily one of the best entries in this anthology.

Sara Habein says

(Review forthcoming, but...) Last year's collection was a lot stronger, but this one had some bright spots.

Rose Caraway says

This book is refreshing, informative, raw, intelligently written and put together perfectly. Rachel Kramer Bussel took her time with this one and should be congratulated! There are twenty essays altogether in this anthology, that cover as many completely individualized topics, and dear reader you will be just as enthralled. My heartstrings were tugged multiple times in, Alex Morris's, "Very Legal: Sex and Love in Retirement" and in Seth Fisher's, "Notes From a Unicorn". Patrick Califia lays BDSM out perfectly in, "Enhancing Masochism: How to Expand Limits and Increase Desire". I cannot wait for next year's, "Best Sex Writing 2014"! It is like reading 20 of the best episodes of, "This American Life". Thanks to all the authors that contributed to this anthology! Well done!

Michelle says

An uneven collection. Lots of personal stories that read like a collection of blog posts. I like the ones that read like articles with a political and historical perspective on sex. It just get tiring to read another memoir essay on BDSM or polyamory.

Best parts:

"Live New Models" by Jonathan Lethem - the difference between nudity and sexualization.

"Can a Better Vibrator Inspire an Age of Great American Sex?" by Andy Isaacson - The history of vibrators and its rise in popularity with a look at how the Lelo company designs their toys.

"Very Legal: Sex and Love in Retirement" by Alex Morris - Exactly what it says on the label. Realistic yet touching.

"Cherry Picking" by Julia Serrano - This about a transgendered woman and how virginity is more complicated than society makes it seem.

"Holy Fuck: the 4th and Long Virgin" by Jon Pressick - Tim Tebow and how it goes against how society views male athletes and lockerrom culture. It was a bit superficial, but explored a little dicussed part of sports culture and (lack of) sex.

"Dear John" by Lori Selke - another BDSM story but the humor makes this memoir more tolerate and its interesting to read how it has changed.

"Sex by any other name" by Insiya Ansari - a virginity story by a Muslim woman. The virginity stories speak to me because they seem to go against the American mainstream culture more. Thi sstory was religious but I would have liked a little more exploration of cultural attitudes compared.

"Enhancing Masochism" by Pat Califia - Califia waxes poetic and philosophical about BDSM. I don't agree but it was a thought provoking article.

"Porn Defends the Money Shot" by Dennis Romero - a excellent article bout the legislation to require condoms in porn and how porn is changing under the pressure of the Internet. It also touches on other issues such as homophobia in porn, escorting, and OSHA.

"Lost Boys" by Kristen Hinman - an informative article on child prostitution. Highly recommends because the research shows that our understanding of child prostitution (not child trafficking) is only reflect 10% or those teens and how it adds in the image of teen prostitution only happening to child and not boys. A must read!

These last two articles are a great contrast to rather lazy article in this collection that defended the Village Voice keeping its backpage adult ads. Overall, it's an uneven collection bogged down by some essays that feel too similar.

Avory says

It's time again!

Time, that is, for *Best Sex Writing 2013*, edited by Rachel Kramer Bussel. This year's anthology is just as good as the last one I reviewed, with another eclectic mix of journalist writing, memoir, and quirky pieces that are tough to categorize. This year's volume covers topics from Jean Harlow to Tim Tebow, and features a number of the big names in sex as contributors--Madison Young, Patrick Califia, Julia Serano, Melissa Gira Grant, Carol Queen. It's hard to sum up in a word, as the contents are so diverse, but I had a few favorite moments.

Carol Queen's "Ghosts: All My Men Are Dead" is a must-read that is particularly poignant for me having gotten to know a little bit about Carol through the conference circuit. We owe this woman such a debt of gratitude as a sex-positive community, and this piece will slam into your heart as you read not only about the devastating effects of AIDS on San Francisco but about a much more complicated story with sexuality and identity at its heart. I'm reminded of a number of other essays I've read about San Francisco at the time, which taken together lead me to wonder what queer identity and art might have become if our communities hadn't lost those particular people at that particular time.

Other pieces are gripping in a more humorous way. Seth Fischer writes "Notes from A Unicorn," picking up on a surge of interest in bisexuality, and one of my favorite comments on queer identity comes from this piece:

The gay rights movement has been so successful because activists like Harvey Milk encouraged people to come out and tell the truth to their families, to their friends and to their coworkers, to be everything they were, to say "We're here, we're queer," yes, but also, implicitly, to say, "We're here, it's complicated and probably it'd be good if we talked about this over tea.

While an amusing one-liner, it's also a great summary of all my complicated feelings about the past decade's emphasis on "coming out!" as a one-time defining moment in a queer person's life. Embrace ambiguity, damnit. I also liked a comment from Ned Mayhem, on a similar note, discussing sexual subcultures in Rachel Swan's polyamory piece "Sex by Numbers":

Mayhem said that a lot of the people he meets in the so-called "sexual underground" are nerds in other parts of their lives--grad students, engineers, costume-party types, bookworms, live-action role players. They tend to be open-minded and well educated, but always a little to the left of what mainstream society would consider "sexy."

Accurate! Can 2013 be the year of the sex nerd?

Finally, continuing on the nerdy theme, one of my favorite informative pieces in this anthology was Andy Isaacson's long-form journalistic piece on the development of JimmyJane vibrators. The piece is very timely in a year of enthusiasm about high-quality, safe, environmentally friendly sex toys, and also just really interesting. It's cool to think of vibrators as luxury goods on the scale of BMWs and stand mixers. I'm not really one for "normalizing" sex (keep sex weird!) but I found this piece rather appealing.

I'd recommend this anthology as a much more fun airplane or beach read than whatever else you were considering. Enjoy!

This review was originally published on the Sex Positive Activism blog and now appears at [Queer & Now](#).

michelle says

some good essays, narrative and informational. check it out.

Sam Warren says

I admit, I went into this book expecting a higher brow version of 'boy meets girl and they shag each other cross-eyed'...the end. This isn't that book. Instead, this is a collection of essays covering everything from role play, dominance, submission, the pitfalls of polyamory, odes to lovers past and more.

I was pleased at the level of thought provoking discussion rendered by the authors. Some stories read like an editorial. The authors having something to say and this being one of the forums available to them to reach us with their thoughts. And all the points being made (and it should be noted that I didn't agree with them all) are worth reading.

A departure from fiction, the stories here seek to cover the vast landscape that is sex and spread light on a little bit of everything. They succeed in doing just that. Through the authors' words and experiences, I have been granted admittance to a world that isn't mine to occupy.

And for me, that's pretty much the whole point of it all.
