Sex Toys R Us

Will disclosure kill River Huston's good vibrations?

October 1, 2005 By River Huston

My health took a dip last year, and my meds left me too weak to work. So when I finally adjusted, I pounded the pavement for quick, easy cash. I wasn't ready to jump back into my life as a performer and writer—and hell, books come out only every few years anyway. Then a friend mentioned she'd been to a sex-toy party. I call them Pampered Pussy Parties: where unsatisfied housewives pass around—then buy—dildos and vibrators. Think Tupperware and Avon…meeting Kinsey and kink. I signed on as hostess and was soon pushing clitoral appliances in suburbia.

In more than 20 years of living with HIV, I've learned lots about sex. I know this sounds crazy, but HIV improved my intimate life. By explaining how to be safe to mostly ignorant straight men in bed, I learned how important communication is to good sex. And if I'm going to go to the trouble of educating, I might as well tell 'em how I like it. Before HIV, I'd hide under the covers and hope for the best. A common approach, I'm afraid.

But applying communication techniques without bruising the male ego can be tricky. That's where all the toys, games and lotions come in. Since I've been hosting, glowing middle-aged matrons stop me in the supermarket, confiding multiple orgasms with the G-Wiz (a contraption that stimulates the G-spot and clitoris simultaneously—you needn't even move!).

I've never disclosed my status at these parties. I begin: "Hi, my name is River, and I am going to change your life." The parent company wants me to start slowly, with novelties like the penis-shaped cake pan. No way. Once these gals let loose, I need my dominatrix skills to keep order. "Ladies, behold the Decadence Indulgence Two. Menopause, antidepressants or just not in the mood? The DI Two will change all that." They reverently pass the vibrating, whirling piece of plastic from hand to hand. I explain: "You're familiar with the clitoris, right? Actually, that organ is merely the tip of the clitoral sponge—the other side is that G-spot you've all heard about. With this innocuous piece of plastic you'll stimulate both sides of your clitoral sponge. Ecstasy is yours with just a couple of triple-A batteries."

By now they're sharing their likes and dislikes, and two volunteers hit the bathroom with the Nympho Niagra cream, having learned that the vulva's not something found in a parking lot. They return giggling and flushed, one woman screaming that her husband had better be ready when she gets home.

I fear that if I brought up HIV, the mood would sink below sea level. I've never heard any STDs—let alone HIV—mentioned. These women all want better sex, and the last thing they want to hear is the consequences of unprotected sex. They don't even know the consequences, because this segment of our population is completely forgotten—we've never considered them a risk of any sort. As I unleash their sexuality, am I wasting the opportunity for much-needed education? I do get many requests for blow-job tips, which I heroically demonstrate on Mr. Dependable ($17).

Next week, my autobiographical show, Sex, Cellulite and Large Farm Equipment: One Girl's Guide to Living and Dying, opens off-off-Broadway, and many of my sex-toy clients will attend. The show confronts my life with HIV, and before I clicked the "send" button on the e-vite, I realized I might be ending my hostess career. Will they see me as the fun-loving sexpert I am? Or will I suddenly seem diseased, my expertise tainted? We shall see.

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