

Of all the email I receive about this column, easily the one subject that most consistently comes up is that of group sex - what my experiences have been like, how one gets invited to group events, how one even finds others interested in group activities in the first place. I say to all of them what I'll say to you now: that if you're having trouble finding group sexual events in your own area of the world, there is literally no better time than the present to throw your own damn party. It's much easier to pull off than you would imagine, you have total control over how the evening progresses, and at least you'll know that you're definitely invited.

Unsurprisingly, most people are highly intimidated by the idea of throwing their own group sexual event - between picking a theme, knowing how to run one, finding people to attend and the actual logistical concerns of just throwing a party, most orgies that could be taking place in our modern world end up getting stymied way back in the conceptualization phase. With this in mind, I thought (ahem) as a public service to my

readers that I would throw a series of four parties myself this summer, each slightly different in theme but all of them having something to do with group sexuality. The hope is to then write detailed articles about how each party went, so that by the end of the summer you would have a rather lengthy four-part "how-to" guide that would inspire you to throw your own.

THE SUMMER PARTY SERIES

PART 1: THE MESSAGE PARTY

(Actually, given that there is an eight-week delay between me writing these columns and you seeing them, it actually might be closer to November before you get the entire four-part series.)

My first party of the summer was just yesterday, in fact (which was coincidentally also the summer solstice, which turned out to be a nice bit of synchronicity). The rest of today's column is dedicated, in outline form, to what went right with the party and what I would change if I threw one again.

1. CONCEPTUALIZATION

There are literally as many different ways to throw a group sex party as there are ways to have sex - everything from an impromptu threeway after the bars close one night, to a week-long Wiccan festival in the woods with candles and robes and naked dancing praises to the Great Earth Mother or whatever they call Her. For a fantastic and exhaustive guide to group sexual parties, I highly recommend an online document called "Enjoying and Hosting Erotic Events," which you can find at [sexuality.org/ehee.html]; it was recommended to me in the first place by Dr. Carol Queen when I met her in 2001, and was the main source of inspiration for my own party.

I decided to throw an event mentioned there called a "massage party," which is specifically for people who are curious about group sexuality but not necessarily ready to throw themselves feet-first into a full-blown orgy (not yet, anyway). The party is so simple as to be ridiculous - you put everyone's name into a hat, and then when someone's name is called they receive a fifteen-minute full-body massage from everyone else in the group simultaneously, first while laying on their stomach and then while laying on their back. And that's it - much simpler than a costume party or scavenger hunt, even though people manage to pull off parties like those all the time.

The great thing about a massage party, and the reason I chose it as my first theme of the summer, is that it allows people to interact at whatever personal level of comfort is right for them, without the host having to set some arbitrary rule for participation that is too explicit for some, not explicit enough for others. For example, you don't even have to take your clothes off if you don't want to; or if you do, you're more than welcome to put them back on after your massage is over. Attendees are welcome to set whatever rules for their own massage that make them comfortable, and then to announce the rules to the circle right before their massage starts: that people shouldn't touch their feet, for example; that it's okay to kiss their nipples but not their clitoris; that their girlfriend can give them a handjob but not the others in the group; that deep french-kissing is not only allowed but highly encouraged.

It gets into one of my biggest overall tips about sexual parties, which I'll be scattering throughout this article: namely, that the success of your party is directly tied to how much fun people have at it, which is itself directly tied to how comfortable people feel while actually in the middle of it all. I've participated in half a dozen

group sexual events myself over the last year, and for the most part found them not exactly to my liking - they were too sterile, too anonymous, the sex too clinical and not with the sense of closeness and intimacy that I enjoy in all my sexual experiences. I was determined to change this situation when it came time for my own parties; to create an environment where people were aroused as much mentally and emotionally as they were physically. Granted, your own party doesn't need to be this way for it to be a success - my point, though, is that as much as possible everyone should feel comfortable while actually participating. No matter what theme you end up choosing, it's never a bad idea to let the partygoers decide at what level they're going to personally participate, as opposed to setting a draconian rule for all that ends up pleasing almost no one.

2. INVITATION

I'll admit it - after now attempting four times over the last year to throw a massage party, only one of which was successful, I'm intimately aware with how difficult it is to find partygoers for group sexual events. You too can expect this to be the one most frustrating part of throwing your own event - the people who say yes then cancel, the people who say yes then never bother showing up, the people who don't write back to you when you invite them in the first place. All is not hopeless, however - after all, I did manage to pull one off last night, and had not only seven incredibly good-looking people attend (three women, four men), but whom were intelligent and culturally aware and sexually adventurous as well. How did I find them? Here's how:

First, I sent an invitation out to about forty of my friends. Do not underestimate this potentially powerful pool of attendees! You may think that you don't know anyone who would be interested in attending an orgy, but many times you'll be quite surprised by just how dirty your little ol' platonic friends really are once the bedroom door is closed. I mean, just look at it rationally: if there's a person out there you legitimately think of as a friend, who you enjoy spending time with and talking to, the chances are greater than 50 percent that they're going to share all kinds of the same interests that you have as well. If nothing else, the party invitation is a gateway to all kinds of great conversations with your friends about sexuality (as happened to me last year while I was writing my book "Slut Summer") and automatically makes you the hero of the circle as well. ("You're so courageous! I could never do something like that." Take your bow, 'cause you deserve it.) This netted me three of the people who were scheduled to attend - three of the women, as a matter of fact, all of whom are single. (My formal invitation, by the way, can be found at jasonpettus.com/mparty.htm]; feel free to steal this invitation word-for-word if you decide to throw your own party.)

Next, I announced the party at the various adult Yahoo groups that I belong to. (See my article "So You Wanna Be A Swinger" for details on joining such groups.) This is a fantastic way to meet people interested in group sexuality, mostly because of the limitations inherent in the groups themselves - namely, you have thousands of people in them, constantly talking about how much they'd like to attend a group sexual event, and almost no one in the group actually throwing events. Once again, you become the hero of the circle by declaring that you are, in fact, going to be having a sex party at your place in two weeks; depending on what kind of party it is and which particular group you belong to, your response number can sometimes reach into the hundreds.

As with anything concerning the internet, be aware and cautious of any stranger who contacts you. Always make people agree to meet with you nonsexually in a crowded public place at least once before the party, just so you can make sure that "Jane, the swinging 27-year-old UNIX programmer" is not in fact "Henry, the 44-year-old postal employee who still lives with his mom and has a basement full of suspicious-smelling refrigerators." (In fact, this is a great way to weed out insincere people as well - if someone can't be bothered to go have a cocktail with you on a Wednesday night, it's most likely that they were never planning on attending your party that Saturday night either.) That being said, I also recommend being as optimistic about it all as possible, and to enter each of these meetings assuming that the person is going to be just as hot, interesting, sincere and funny as you. As with everything else in life, we reap what we sow; if you make a concentrated effort to be outgoing, friendly and smart in your original invitation, you will stand a much greater chance of hearing from other outgoing, friendly, smart people. If your invitation, however, says something to the effect of, "I don't trust you and here's a bunch of hoops you're going to have to jump through and by the way SINGLE MEN FUCK OFF AND DIE!!!!!!," most likely people are going to respond to you in kind. I met a total of four attendees through Yahoo invitations (one woman and three men, including a long-term couple), bringing the total up to seven.

And finally, I went around and checked the various personal ads I have up at commercial sites, includ-

ing The Onion [personals.theonion.com] and Illinois Swing Quest [wildbytes.com/isq]. Now, the personal ads I have up at commercial sites are always sex-oriented ones anyway; I don't feel it would be ethically right of me to advertise for a girlfriend while I'm in the middle of having all this strange sex with random strangers these days, so I basically state upfront that I'm a sex columnist and that I'm looking for interesting, casual situations from people who write. In this case, I had a couple contact me about a week before the party (a really fucking cute couple, incidentally, who are both bisexual and into Grant Morrison comics and Radiohead and tribal tattoos...but I digress). The couple didn't know anything about the party at that point and had just written about generally getting together sometime; I mentioned the party to them, though, and sent them the link to the invitation, and they naturally found it right up their alley. This now made nine attendees, which when you added me started really stretching the limits of how many people can fit in my apartment. Time for a party!

3. PREPARATION

I know what you're thinking - that your apartment isn't nearly big enough to host an orgy. That's where you're wrong; in fact, as many of the partygoers mentioned last night, the small size of my own apartment (which is barely bigger than the average dorm room) actually made for a much closer, more intimate, more erotic experience for all. Stop worrying about the size of your apartment and instead figure out just how many people you can comfortably invite - or if you have some extra money, just go rent a hotel suite and stop your worrying altogether.

Certain preparation tips are applicable to any kind of party you're going to throw, whether or not it's sexual: make sure your apartment is good and clean before everyone arrives; provide a little liquor and a little food for your guests, with the gentle reminder that they should bring more of both with them; compile a stack of CDs that emanate that gentle yet energetic vibe that you want to be the hallmark of your evening. (Belle & Sebastian went over really well last night; so did XTC.) When throwing a sexual party there are other issues to keep in mind, like having your shower ready in case anyone's feeling grimy after their massage; having a fresh stack of clean towels for the same reason; laundering your bed linens that afternoon so they still smell spring-like-fresh; and making sure that you have condoms and lubrication and all those other things you'll need if the party suddenly gets more explicit than you were planning (which, of course, is the unspoken hope of throwing a massage party in the first place).

Here's another tip for party preparations, one that you may or may not wish to heed - set up a distinct area for the sexual activities that's different from your personal bed. I happen to own a futon in addition to my usual mattress, so when the time for the massages came I simply cleared away the main lounging area of my apartment and set up the futon on the floor with a fresh set of linens and a couple of pillows. This solved several problems at once: it allowed for greater ease of movement among everyone in attendance; it allowed people to kneel more comfortably around the person receiving the massage; it saved my bed from the potential of breaking under the collective poundage of seven half-naked people; and it allowed me to separate the activities of the party in my mind from the usual nesting space of my bed, where I usually feel so warm and secure and completely inside myself when I'm in my apartment alone. As someone who's been swinging for a year now, I can attest to how emotionally important it is to keep these types of activities straight in your head; after all, my sex life is my SEX life, not my ENTIRE life, and even such little things like doing the massages on my futon have helped immensely with me no longer feeling like I'm going to be the next Bob Crane, destined to be killed by some disgruntled swinger in a dingy hotel in Scottsdale, Arizona.

4. CONVERSATION

People started straggling in to my party around 8:00 last night, and by 9:30 just about everyone who was to eventually show had arrived. Now, I had wanted to make very sure that people had at least a couple of hours to interact in a nonsexual way before the actual massages started; I would highly recommend you doing the same when it comes to your own sexual event. People get nervous about attending an orgy, man, no matter who they are - and even more importantly, they're apprehensive about the caliber of the other attendees, most of whom they're meeting for the first time that night. Giving my guests a chance to interact the same way they would at a traditional party helped greatly to dispel the collective nervousness in the room; before long everyone in attendance had started realizing that everyone else in attendance was just like them (that is, smart and good-looking and funny and who just happen to be interested in group sex, but usually never talk about it in public). Besides, three hours of drinking wine, smoking pot, and listening to quiet music in a candlelit room

doesn't exactly hurt when it comes to lowering inhibitions.

Of course, "nonsexual" doesn't necessarily mean "without any sense of eroticism." As a matter of fact, I spent the entire evening deliberately steering the conversation towards sex, although I was encouraging people to share their own stories about their past experiences, not to talk about the upcoming massages. Sex is just an endlessly entertaining topic to talk about in the first place, and especially when the people talking are sexually adventurous (and let's face it - if someone's agreed to attend an orgy, the chances are likely that they're sexually adventurous). Talking about sexuality with your fellow partygoers also helps to change the nervous tension formerly in the room into a delicious sexual tension that makes people look more and more forward to the explicit part of the evening itself. I mean, there you are, sitting about six inches away from this total fucking hottie, while they tell you about this really nasty threeway they had back when they were an undergraduate - it's hard in a situation like that to not start looking forward to putting your hands all over their naked body later in the evening.

5. PARTICIPATION

By 11 pm I had grown tired of waiting for the three people who never ended up showing (one couple and one single female), so decided to go ahead and start the massage part of the evening. Now, I happen to be a big fan of ritual, especially when it's applied to the everyday occurrences in our lives - the ritual of brushing your teeth in the morning, the ritual of the wedding toast, the ritual of lighting a cigarette when you reach the bus stop. I decided to incorporate a little bit of this into my party as well, mostly so that people would have a crystal-clear understanding of what was going on. Like I said, I've attended my fair share of group sexual events over the last year, and for the most part they've been utterly confusing as far as understanding when the explicit activities were to begin and how I was to approach others at the party and what exactly constituted appropriate and inappropriate behavior. It's always been one of my biggest complaints about my past experiences, because I've then spent the rest of the evening feeling slightly off-kilter, like at any moment someone was going to tell me that I was behaving inappropriately and ask me to leave, or that someone would approach me and start behaving in a way that made me uncomfortable.

In the case of my own party, I literally made an announcement when the massages were to begin - i.e. "Okay, it's 11 pm now and it's time to start the massage part of the evening." For the rest of the partygoers it was an undeniable sign that this was IT - the moment to finish their cigarettes and stop the idle chit-chat and really start focusing in on the sexual activities at hand. While everyone was sitting in a circle, I spent a few minutes going over the rules again - how people were in charge of setting their own boundaries when they entered the circle, how no one was to touch a person's genitals or kiss them unless they had specifically given permission beforehand, how people were welcome to step out of the circle at any time for a bathroom break or to smoke a cigarette or if they were just feeling a little freaked out by everything going on.

I asked if anyone had any questions; when it became clear that no one did, I solicited help from other partygoers in setting up the massage space. This turned out to be an accidentally fun thing; having four or five people moving tables, rearranging candles, and tucking the linens under the edge of my futon I think helped everyone feel like they were an active communal part of everything going on. (I say 'accidental' because I would've set all this up in advance, if not for the fact that I have such a tiny apartment; in hindsight, though, I'm glad that I had to set it up during the party itself.) By the time we were done we had created this rather lovely little ritualized space in which to hold the massages; a stretch of floor roughly eight feet by six feet, bracketed on all sides by my bookshelves, my chairs and my bed, two dozen candles set up in a big wide circle around the space itself.

Before drawing a name out of the hat, I announced that I would gladly take the place of the first person to get picked, if they were too nervous about going first. This, I think, is just a necessary evil of being the host of the party; after all, at this point people were still highly nervous about taking their clothes off in front of everyone, so sometimes you just gotta suck it up and throw yourself out there for the sake of the party, even if it means receiving a less intense massage than anyone else. One of the single men was picked first, and sure enough asked me to take his place; I was still a little nervous about disrobing myself, to tell you the truth, so stepped into my walk-in closet to do so (which is not really a closet per se, but rather a small hallway connecting my living space to my bathroom). Finally, the moment of truth - naked as the day I was born, I meekly stepped out into the living room again and laid face-down on the futon, while another guest set the timer for

seven minutes.

Please know this if you are planning on throwing a massage party - no matter what you might think, you will never have a fucking clue what it's like to have twelve hands simultaneously on your naked body until you actually try it. It was literally one of the most intense, overwhelming erotic experiences I've had in my entire life - so much so that it was starting to tap into some primal emotions of mine that I usually carry deep inside myself and never show to other people. This is a constant danger, in fact, among any event that's designed to heighten the emotional and intimate parts of sexuality - if just the slightest thing had started going wrong during my massage, or if I had been in any less of a good mood than I was, I could've easily seen myself bursting into a hysterical crying fit in the middle of my massage just from the intensity of it and the way it was tapping directly into my primal emotions. Keep this in mind when throwing your own event - that people can sometimes have weird emotions get triggered when experiencing an intense sexual sensation, and that you should have a strategy in place for letting these people go through these emotions without disturbing the mood of the rest of the party. (This tip comes only with hindsight, by the way - in fact, I had not devised a strategy like this before my own party, and would've been fucked if someone had had an emotional breakdown during their massage.)

That all being said, my massage was fucking great! I ended up keeping my eyes closed the entire time, which turned out to be the key for me enjoying it as much as I did; at no point did I ever actually know which person in the group was massaging which part of my body, or whose delicate little hand was currently wrapped around my cock and jerking it off like the world was about to end. One of the men? One of the women? One of the strangers? One of my friends? Who knows? Who cares! I had a total of three people make out with me during my massage, and to this day I still don't know which of the other six they were - all I know is that they each had very soft lips and really knew how to kiss. All right! Like I said, it was this very, very, VERY intense experience, one that I simultaneously couldn't stand another second of and also wanted to last for the rest of the night. I heartily recommend experiencing a group erotic massage if you ever get a chance.

At the end of my fifteen minutes, I had a partygoer pick another name out of the hat while I went back into the closet and got dressed. The second person ended up being the female half of the cute fucking comics-loving couple, and she ended up walking into the closet right when I was walking out. She came back out in her panties, and had a slightly different boundary than me - that people were allowed to touch whatever parts of her body were currently showing, but not the parts covered by her underwear (i.e. buttocks and genitals). She laid down on her stomach and we all got to work again.

It was fascinating to be on the giving end of the massages - to watch how the six of us interacted with the receiver's body in an endless myriad of ways, to watch how the receiver actually responded to the massage both in terms of body movement and facial expression. (In fact, the six of us would end up silently switching places at some point during each massage, both for our own enjoyment and so that the receiver would never quite know who was massaging any given area of their body at any given moment.) It was clear that this woman was reacting to the massage in the same intense way I had reacted to my own; in fact, all seven of the attendees ended up responding intensely to their massage, and for most people it took a good two or three minutes after their time was over before they were able to stand up again or even speak out loud. Well, right fucking on, man - see, I KNEW a group sex party could be intense and emotional and highly erotic, if you just put a little thought into how it's being thrown.

A total of three people ended up stripping nude for their massages and telling people it was okay to do anything they wanted; another three people ended up stripping to their underwear and declaring the same rule as the woman described above (and by the way, it's incredibly fun to run your finger along the edge of someone's underwear in that kind of situation; it makes their hips kind of buck and produces this wonderful little moan from their mouth), while one of the women wore a Lycra running bra as well and specifically told people not to put their finger in her bellybutton. The interesting thing about the evening was that the massages really were having a cumulative effect - as the night progressed and people continued to feel more and more comfortable, and then more and more bold, a little more sexual interaction started taking place among the people actually giving the massages, not just the person currently receiving one.

For me it was surprising - I had had no plans on interacting sexually with other attendees at all, except for the specific person who was currently in the middle of the circle. But there I was, massaging the male half

of the cute fucking comics-loving couple mentioned earlier, as his girlfriend was kneeling right next to me, our half-naked bodies rubbing up against each other every time we leaned over to massage another part of her boyfriend's body. At a certain point our faces came within a couple of inches of each other; the next thing we knew, we had reached in and were furiously making out, even while all four of our hands were still executing a massage on her boyfriend's body (and one of mine actually giving him a handjob as well, to tell you the truth). I put my free hand around her waist; a few seconds later, she started making out with one of the single males on the other side of her, while I was still holding her around her torso; a few seconds after that, now I was making out with the single male while she had her free hand around me. And then we all looked at each other and broke out in uproarious laughter.

Don't get me wrong - nothing explicit happened among the people giving massages, other than a lot of kissing and a little groping. My point, though, is that none of us had planned on even these soft activities happening, but just found it naturally coming out as we all became more and more comfortable with each other and the mood of the room more and more erotic. It was a spontaneous event, one that nobody seemed to mind; at the same time, though, all seven of us seemed hyperaware of the boundaries we had set earlier, so not once did anyone ever make a grab for another person's genitals or otherwise act in a way that made anyone else uncomfortable. It was nice, you know? All seven of us ended up creating this very safe atmosphere, one where we all understood the rules but also understood where the rules could be stretched, while still being careful not to actually break the rules. It was...man. It was everything I ever wanted a group sexual event to be like, in the year I've been swinging now and the eighteen previous years I had been fantasizing about group sex. It was fantastic - what do you want me to say?

6. CONTEMPLATION

Between the bathroom breaks and the dressing time between massages, it was nearly 2:00 in the morning before we finally got done massaging everyone in the group. I had thought at that point that everyone would be saying goodbye and heading home, but I was wrong - in fact, everyone stuck around for nearly another half-hour, simply drinking more and smoking more and talking about what had just happened. This turned out, by the way, to be one of the most important aspects of the entire party, and I highly recommend scheduling some free time at the end of the night to let anyone who wants to just hang out and decompress. Like I said, the massages turned out to be a much more intense and emotional experience than any of us were expecting (in fact, partygoers described the experience in such terms as "mystical," "religious," and "overpowering") and it turned out that people were in real need to process it all, to talk to their fellow partygoers and make sure that people were feeling the same way they were. There was a definite sense of communal intimacy in the room that last half-hour, as people talked earnestly about what their experience had just been like and how it had differed from what they had expected it to be. (I did very little talking, to tell you the truth - I simply sat back and marveled that my attendees had had such a good time to begin with. Take a bow, Jason, 'cause you deserve it.)

I invited everyone to stay and initiate a second, more explicit round of activities, but no one did - or, that is, two people ended up sticking around, a single woman and a single man, but they seemed really into each other and not as much into me. Besides, I had known the woman platonically for several years through the Chicago poetry scene, so felt kind of uncomfortable about having a direct sexual experience with her. So I suggested that the guy give the woman a ride home; with any luck she ended up inviting him into her apartment later and the two of them ended up having hot monkey-ass sex all night long.

So anyway, there it is - my complete guide to throwing your own massage party. As you've seen, it wasn't nearly as difficult to pull off as you may think at first, and everyone in attendance had a much more erotic time than they were expecting. My thanks to everyone who attended mine, and I wish you much luck on throwing your own.

[The other three parties in this series include a bisexual party, a jack/jill-off party (where no intercourse will take place, only self-gratification and neighborly assistance), and an Ecstasy party (where attendees will take a hit of Ecstasy at the beginning of the night and hopefully participate in a big sweaty orgy by the end). Yes, you are invited to these parties! Simply send a photo of yourself (clothed okay) to ilikejason at hotmail dot com, along with a letter explaining who you are and which party you would like to attend. Please be aware that you will be required to meet with Jason nonsexually at least once before the party, and that this meeting must take place within the city limits of Chicago.]