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Atlanta's 'Velvet Lips' in business to ensure pleasure for lesbians, all people

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When lesbian couples, queer couples, and even straight couples come to Marla Stewart, they are often seeking advice on how to renew that sexual spark they had at the beginning of their relationship.

“When people are in the honeymoon stage, they are having sex all the time and everything is great. The sex tends to stop if one person is not getting certain desires met,” Stewart explains.

Typically with lesbian couples, miscommunication is the reason the sex stops, Stewart, who identifies as queer, says. “Women have a hard time describing our true desires,” she says.

Stewart, 33, is owner of Velvet Lips in Atlanta, a sex-positive business that is “bringing sexy back to sex education.” Currently working toward a PhD in sociology, gender and sexuality at Georgia State University, Stewart also studied human sexuality at San Francisco State University and among her friends and clients earned the nickname “The Sex Architect.”

“The whole process [of giving sex advice] began very organically. In college, friends came to me — even random strangers would come up to me with their sex issues and their sex problems,” says Stewart. “People are drawn to me for some reason, so it was natural to get in the business.”

Being a professional sex, intimacy and relationship coach and sex educator has taken Stewart across the country to sit on panels at various conferences. She’s giving a sex-positive workshop at the National Gay and Lesbian Task Force’s Creating Change Conference in Houston this weekend and on Feb. 8 will be part of an erotic writing workshop at Atlanta’s lesbian-owned feminist bookstore, Charis Books & More.

Sex education important to being sex-positive

Stewart credits her parents, especially her mother, as well as growing up in the “hippie culture” of San Francisco for instilling in her a sex-positive attitude.

“My mother educated me at a very young age, around second grade, and always gave me lots of books to read surrounding sexuality,” she says.

Because her mother was 17 when Stewart was born, she also wanted to make sure her daughter felt safe and was responsible for her sexual health.

“Her belief was, ‘if you’re old enough to buy condoms by yourself at the store, then you’re old enough to have sex,’” says Stewart.

So when she was 16, Stewart decided it was time to have sex with her boyfriend. Later that year, she came out as bisexual. Her mother was shocked at first, but then joined PFLAG and gave Stewart a lesbian sex pamphlet “because she didn’t know what two women did together but wanted to make sure that I was always protecting myself,” Stewart says.

The two are now collaborating on another sexuality project. “In essence, I get it from my mama,” she says.

‘Makes me excited every time’

Stewart’s approach as a sex educator is a cross between surrogacy and sex therapy, she says. She will not have sex with clients, but she will teach them how to touch.

“The best thing is watching people’s faces when they enjoy how someone touches them. It makes me excited me every time,” she says.

A workshop Stewart offers specifically for lesbians, bisexual and queer women is “Bound for Zami and Sappho” where women can learn ways to overcome stigma and how “foster your sexuality as you relate to your lovers.”

She also has workshops on the power of seduction and ways to have better orgasms. The better orgasms workshop means you get a mirror and look at your vagina, your G spot, your anus and getting to know your own body. She also has a workshop on how to give oral sex.

The most requested workshop, though, is from couples wanting to renew their sexual energy.

In this workshop, Stewart teaches body mapping, a clothes-on exercise in which partners take turns touching each other to find where each like to be touched the most and the spots that evoke arousal.

The workshop is also about what “love language” each person speaks and communicating desires to their partners. There are issues such as past trauma that also may need to be addressed.

In lesbian relationships, one partner might have

a lower libido, Stewart says. “They really want to have sex but they just can’t. So I recommend just saying yes and remembering how great the sex was before while paying attention to your feelings and see where it leads. It could be you just need a jump start,” she says.

Remaining curious is also key to a healthy and happy sex life, Stewart says. Don’t be embarrassed to express what you want, she adds.

“I think the issues happen in sex lives because most people are really scared to learn more about their sexuality and don’t know how to go about learning more. And even when I meet with them they tend not to be sure,” she says.

It’s OK to be timid but again, learning that it is OK to be open about sex — to be sex-positive — is an achievable goal, Stewart says.

‘There’s nothing like it’

As a queer woman who works with straight couples, Stewart says she makes sure to be open about her sexuality to everyone she teaches and interacts with. While we live in a binary world, Stewart believes there are more than two genders.

“I always try to implement that into every workshop. I’m always open about my sexuality. Whatever workshop I’m having, I will always out myself. I work with everybody. Straight folks, queer folks, lesbian couples, single straight men. I haven’t broken into the gay male market, though. I’m still trying to figure that one out,” she says.

And what about having sex with a sex therapist? Can Stewart turn her brain off and get down and enjoy having sex without analyzing every move?

“That’s a very good question!” she says, laughing.

“The analyzing process does happen but not all the time. Most of the time I’m enjoying myself. If something is sort of out of whack, then the analyzing comes in – and I’ll be, wait a minute, there wasn’t enough foreplay,” she says.

“But when I have sex and I’m taking all that sexual energy and manifesting everything I want — there’s nothing like it. Sex is a gateway to spirituality and other energy realms. I love sex,” she says.