

# PURE ROMANCE AND INDIANA UNIVERSITY CENTER FOR SEXUAL HEALTH PROMOTION

## A Research and Education Partnership to Improve Women's Sexual Health

For media interested in talking with the researchers about the work described below, contact Indiana University Media Relations Officer Tracy James at [traljame@indiana.edu](mailto:traljame@indiana.edu).

### **EDUCATION PROJECTS**

#### Online Sexuality Education Training

Researchers and sexuality educators from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University worked to create a 14-unit English language training that went live in 2009. Following the success of this program, a Spanish language version of the training was created in partnership with the team from Indiana University and their colleagues at the University of Puerto Rico. This online training is available to Pure Romance Consultants.

#### Sexual Health 101 Training

In 2006, researchers and sexuality educators from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University created a DVD-based sexuality training for in-home party facilitators. In 2011, the training was revised in English and a second version in Spanish was created. Both trainings are now available online to Pure Romance Consultants.

### **AREAS OF RESEARCH**

#### Enhancement Products

Although enhancement products are widely used by adult women in the United States, little research has been conducted to understand to what extent they work to enhance arousal or pleasure, or to what extent they are comfortable to use. Researchers at the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University conducted a double-blind, randomized, placebo-controlled study comparing the effect of two enhancement products (versus placebos) on women's ratings of their sexual experiences, such as sexual pleasure, arousal and orgasm. Data analyses are underway and scientific manuscripts are being prepared.

### Perceptions of Dilator Use among Cervical Cancer Patients

Vaginal dilators are commonly recommended for use by women who are undergoing radiation for gynecological cancers, including cervical cancer. However, many women choose not to use vaginal dilators and may consequently find that the vaginal canal is less flexible. This may result in sexual function difficulties (such as painful penetration) or may be a barrier to having future pelvic exams. The current study seeks to better understand the factors that contribute to the ease of dilator use among cervical cancer patients. It is being carried out in partnership with researchers at the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University and the University of Tennessee. This study is ongoing.

### Sexual Lubricants

Over the past decade, lubricants have become commonplace in the United States – at in-home parties as well as in drug stores. However, strikingly little was known about lubricant use among women. Researchers from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University conducted a randomized, double-blind study that examined women’s ratings of sexual pleasure, satisfaction and genital symptoms when using one of six water-based or silicone-based lubricants. Findings from the study showed that lubricant use was associated with higher ratings of sexual pleasure and satisfaction. Also, women rarely experienced genital symptoms (such as irritation or burning) when they used lubricants.

Given the richness of the data set, an additional set of analyses was conducted to better understand the changing patterns of pubic hair removal among a sample of more than 2,000 adult women. Findings demonstrated that women are diverse in terms of their pubic hair grooming behaviors. Most women – particularly in younger age groups – appear to engage in some degree of hair removal, such as shaving or waxing, with shaving being the most common. However, most women (especially those 30+) appear to keep some of their pubic hair and remove only a portion of it.

#### *Scientific publications:*

Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Hensel, D., Sanders, S., Jozkowski, K., and Fortenberry J.D. (in press). Association of lubricant use with women's sexual pleasure, sexual satisfaction and genital symptoms: a prospective daily diary study. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 8, 202-212.

Herbenick, D., Schick, V., Reece, M., Sanders, S.A., & Fortenberry, J.D. (2010). Pubic hair removal among women in the United States: prevalence, methods and characteristics. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 3322-3330.

#### *Scientific conference presentations:*

Jozkowski, K.N., Herbenick, D., Hensel, D., Schick, V., Reece, M., & Fortenberry, J.D. (2010). Lubricant use as a mechanism to enhance sexual activity. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Las Vegas, NV.

Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Sanders, S.A., Dodge, B., Ghassemi, A., & Fortenberry, J.D. (2009). Prevalence and Characteristics of Vibrator Use by Women in the United States: Results from a Nationally Representative Study. International Academy of Sex Research, San Juan, Puerto Rico.

Jozkowski, K., Herbenick, D., Hensel, D. J., Reece, M., & Fortenberry, J.D. (2009). How and why women use lubricants during sexual activity. American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, PA.

### Characteristics of Women who Attend In-Home Parties

Researchers from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University surveyed more than 1,000 women who attend in-home sex toy parties in the United States to better understand who these women are and what their expectations are about such parties, as well as their consumer purchase patterns.

Data from this study are currently being prepared for scientific publication. In addition, findings have been presented at several scientific conferences.

#### *Scientific conferences:*

Jozkowski, K. Schick, V., Herbenick, D. & Reece, M. (2010). Sexuality information seeking among women who attend in-home sex toy parties in the US. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Las Vegas, NV.

Satinsky, S., Jozkowski, K., Herbenick, D., & Reece, M. (2010). Body size, image, and sexual subjectivity as predictors of sexual behaviors among women attending in-home sex toy parties. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Las Vegas, NV.

Jawed-Wessel, S., Satinsky, S., Schick, V., Herbenick, D.S, & Reece, M. (2010). The sexually conscious consumer: characteristics of women attending in-home sex toy parties in the US. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Las Vegas, NV.

Jawed-Wessel S, Schick V, Herbenick D, Reece M. (2010). Sexual enhancement product Use among a sample of women attending in-home sex toy parties. Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, Las Vegas, NV.

Satinsky, S., Reece, M., & Herbenick, D. (2009). Little evidence of negative sexual health outcomes among women using sex toys. American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, PA.

Satinsky, S., Herbenick, D., and Reece, M. (2008). Sexual Body-Esteem of Women Who Attend In-Home Sex Toy Parties: An Exploration of the Association of BMI, Body Satisfaction, and Feminist Identification. Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, San Juan, PR.

Fischtein, D., Satinsky, S., Herbenick, D., and Reece, M. (2008). Women's questions at in-home sex toy parties: Examining the heterosexual script. Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality, San Juan, PR.

## Characteristics of Women who Lead In-Home Parties

With the enormous growth of the in-home party industry over the past two decades, it has become increasingly clear that in-home sex toy party facilitators (“Consultants”) engage in a number of important conversations about sexual health with women who attend these parties. A survey of more than 1,000 of these women (“Consultants”) was carried out by researchers from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion at Indiana University. It sought to better understand and document the types of questions that women ask at in-home sex toy parties as well as how these facilitators serve as lay health advisers or in a sexuality education capacity. Findings from this study showed that facilitators are frequently asked questions about sexual health, such as how sex changes during pregnancy, after hysterectomy, or in relation to menopause. In-home party facilitators likely experience many “teachable moments” during their parties, providing women with many opportunities to ask questions about sex. This study also explored the potential for in-home party facilitators to work together with sex educators or therapists to enhance the information provided to women who attend such parties.

In addition, the female genital self-image scale (FGSIS) was first validated and tested among this sample of women. The FGSIS is used to better understand how genital self-image influences women’s sexual behavior and feelings about their sexuality.

### *Scientific publications:*

Herbenick, D., & Reece, M. (2010). Development and validation of the female genital self image scale. *Journal of Sexual Medicine*, 7, 1822-1830.

Fisher, C. M., Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Dodge, B., Satinsky, S., & Fischtein, D. (2010). Exploring sexuality education opportunities at in-home sex toy parties in the United States. *Sex Education*, 10(2), 131-144.

Herbenick, D. and Reece, M. (2009). In-home sex toy party facilitators as sex educators: what questions are they asked and what makes them more ‘askable’? *American Journal of Sexuality Education*, 4(2), 178-193.

Herbenick, D., Reece, M., & Hollub, A. (2009). Inside the ordering room: characteristics of women's in-home sex toy parties, facilitators and sexual communication. *Sexual Health*. 6(4), 318-327.

### *Scientific conferences:*

Fisher, C.M., Herbenick, D., Reece, M., and Dodge, B. (2009). Exploring the advancement of sexual health knowledge among women at in-home sex toy parties. American Public Health Association, Philadelphia, PA.

Fisher, C.M., Herbenick, D., and Reece, M. (2009). Exploring opportunities for increasing sexual literacy among women at in-home sex toy parties. *Transcending Boundaries in Sexuality Research: Bridging Disciplines & Communities*, Campus Coalition for Sexual Literacy Regional Student Conference, Bloomington, IN

### Sexual Function among Young Survivors of Breast Cancer

Sexual difficulties among breast cancer survivors have been documented in a number of studies. However, very little scientific research had been conducted on young survivors of breast cancer. In addition, only a handful of studies had asked women what they would like to do in order to improve their experience of sexuality. Researchers from the Center for Sexual Health Promotion conducted a survey of young breast cancer survivors (women who had been diagnosed with breast cancer when they were younger than 50), assessing their sexual function and asking about their interest in using a range of sexual enhancement products including vaginal lubricants, vibrators and other sex toys, and massage products. Findings demonstrated that young survivors of breast cancer commonly experience sexual difficulties during treatment as well as in the months or years following treatment (particularly genital pain). Also, the women who participated in the study were largely interested in products to enhance their own sexual experiences, such as lubricants and vibrators, and less interested in male-related sexual products.

#### *Scientific presentations:*

Herbenick, D., Reece, M., Hollub, A., Satinsky, S., & Dodge, B. (2008) Young female breast cancer survivors: Their sexual function and interest in sexual enhancement products and services. *Cancer Nursing, 31(6)*, 417-425.

#### *Scientific conferences:*

Hollub, A., Herbenick, D., Reece, M., & Satinsky, S. (2007). Young breast cancer survivors and sexual dysfunction. Society for the Scientific Study of Sexuality Annual Meeting, Indianapolis, IN.