

SEX ON THE BRAIN By PATRICK GALLAHUE



December 7, 2003 -- To be a star of today's group sex and the city, you need more than just courage and a disco chain. You need to be fit, waxed, groomed, manicured - and, in one notable case, you even need to get a passing grade on an essay.

A hostess named Palagia - who dubs her events "a high-class adult playground" - requires that wannabe-patrons write an essay (grammar and spelling count!) and complete a questionnaire on their fantasies, fears, sexual preferences and/or sexual history. They must also submit

pictures.

Palagia has been throwing parties through her company, One Leg Up, for 4 1/2 years (her alias is another name for the Greek goddess of love, Aphrodite).

Her website, onelegupnyc.com, now receives thousands of e-mails a month and has over 1,000 "members" (couples together for at least one year or single women only) who have passed the rigorous screening for her "eat-in" parties - where on-premises sex is condoned.

Yet essays that are too lewd - or written by only one partner - will get shot down fast. "If I get an essay where it's obvious they didn't put time and effort into it, I'm not reading past the opening paragraph," says Palagia.

She employs the rigorous screening process to ensure that couples know what they're getting into. "You're not going to work in an environment like this if you haven't explored your boundaries," she says.

Self-knowledge is crucial, agrees sex therapist Albert Ellis.

"[Swinging] is healthy if they have good ego control and unconditional self-acceptance," says Ellis, author of "Sex Without Guilt in the 21st Century."

It's a special danger given that these parties are populated by the 35-and-under crowd - who must, it should be noted, also be hot.

"The old-school swingers were 50 percent out of shape and thought they could just grab anybody," says Grego, the 36-year-old libidinal liberator of Brooklyn. "At my parties, it's the cream of the crop."

At this party in Grego's 3,000 square-foot "Love Loft" in East Williamsburg, dozens of naked people are frolicking on mattresses in three different rooms - but getting into this party is tougher than getting into some colleges.

Grego screens for age, fitness, looks and even personality through his website, gregos-nyc.com, and a subsequent telephone interview.

Sure-fire ways to the doors wide shut: being overly sexual, brutish and especially cocky.

"I don't care how good they look," says Grego. "[If they're cocky], they're not getting in here."

Grego's guests appreciate the Darwinian selection process. "Most clubs don't pre-screen and you end up with geriatrics," says 22-year-old Kitty, leaning naked in the kitchen.

Alex, a tall, handsome 30-year-old writer, agrees. "Older people will say, 'You young people are so shallow.' But come on, this is New York City. Most people are smart and good-looking."

Though orgies are often the climax of such play parties, there's no shortcut around courting and romance, according to many regulars. Even in such risqué environs where looks and a fast hand on your zipper get you through the door, many say attitude and flirtation are what close the deal.

"There's an etiquette to it like anything else," says 29-year-old Evan, one of Grego's partiers. "It's not like you club her over the head and have your way with her."

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