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Atlanta Explores Sexuality in Sex Down South

by Winnie McCroy
EDGE Editor
Tuesday Oct 6, 2015

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On October 15-17 head down to Atlanta, for the three-day sex and sexuality conference Sex Down South, coming to the Sheraton Atlanta Airport Hotel.

"We love sex-positive spaces and freedom of expression is a human right! We think they're important for a few reasons," said Sex Down South organizers, Tia Mosley & Marla Stewart. "The first reason is because we live in the South. Living in the Bible Belt has its share of stigma, shame and repression, so our goal to foster learning in an environment that feels safe, loving and affirming of all the various ways you can be sexually, can really shape your experience in a more positive direction. Second, sharing information about your sexuality helps others to see how their sexual life can be improved or changed in a more positive manner. We want to make sure that people have the freedom to share this information where you don't feel like

you're being judged for who you are."

Sex Down South is the only sexuality conference of its kind in the nation with a strong focus on highlighting sexual topics and issues of interest to women of color, transgender and gender non-conforming folks, sex workers, queer people and differently-abled individuals. Sex Down South will explore how race, gender, class, ability, religion and other factors influence our experiences of our bodies and our sexualities.



The organizers (Source:YouTubeStill)

"All of the presenters that we have are absolutely fantastic! We're honestly looking forward to seeing a little bit of everyone," said Mosley and Stewart. "We've had the privilege of seeing some of the presenters already at other conferences here in the South, and we're super excited to have them at our conference as well. We're really looking forward to seeing what our fantastic sex celebs have to say and teach us, especially because they have been super supportive in this whole process of putting this together."

Sex Down South is a safe space for everyday people and "sexperts" alike to teach and share, with the hope that all participants leave the conference knowing more about their own sexualities and desires than when they arrived. The theme of Sex Down South 2015 is Transcending Sex, and will include an in-depth exploration of different tantric practices.

Conference attendees can choose from more than 50 presenters and workshops, including appearances by Sex Celebs including Devi Ward, Tristan Taormino, Lee Harrington, Dr. Ruth Neustifter and Dr. Tamara Campbell-Griffin.

Among the celebrity panelists at the event is Amy Jo Goddard, who delivered her TEDx talk "Owning Your Sexual Power" in March 2014 in Napa Valley. She said in order to own your sexual power, you must acknowledge your sexuality and your true desires, and begin to connect to the sexual being that you are.

"Sexuality is core to who we are and it is the well we draw from for every creative thing we do," Goddard told EDGE. "Sexual energy is creative energy. Sexual power is a wellspring that feeds us, nourishes us, reminds us



Amy Jo Goddard (Source:www.sexdownsouth.com)

of our aliveness and our wholeness. Owning your sexual power and not being afraid of it, but rather unabashedly being a sexual being in all you do makes you more connected, more authentic, unstoppable; it defragments you so that you can be the whole being you truly are."

Goddard said that learning about who you are sexually allows you to connect with all of your other true desires, and develop the skills to meet those desires.

"Ask for what you want -- not just in sex, but in work, with money, at the restaurant when you ordered your steak medium and got rare. The little things matter. Owning your sexual power is a practice and it imbues every part of your life," she said.



(Source:www.sexdownsouth.com)

Presenting at the event is Devi Ward, Certified Tantric Healer, Certified Reiki Practitioner, Tibetan Tantric Dakini of the Shangpa Kagyu Lineage, and one of the first Westerners qualified to teach the Secret Tibetan Five Element Sexual Tantras. Sex educator, consultant and writer Catherine Gross will also be there, offering classes that focus on physical skills, Master/slave relationships, dominance and submission, improving your sex life, personal development, house

management, service, keeping relationships healthy, implementation and much more.

And Dr. Elizabeth Sheff, author of the book "The Polyamorists Next Door: Inside Multiple-Partner Relationships and Families" will also be in attendance. Sheff has written numerous academic and legal articles pertaining to polyamory, gender, families, and sexual minorities, and has given more than 20 radio, podcast, print, and television interviews with sources from Radio Slovenia to National Public Radio, the Sunday London Times to the Boston Globe and Newsweek, CNN to National Geographic Television.

"Just like any other relationship, making polyamory 'work' depends on the people involved and how they handle themselves," Sheff told EDGE. "By establishing boundaries that meet everyone's needs, learning to communicate effectively, and consciously practicing relationships skills and techniques, poly folks are able to maintain lasting, loving, and satisfying relationships."



Organizer Marla Stewart (Source:ProjectQ)


Sheff said that polyamory isn't very common among the transgender community, who most likely gravitate towards serial monogamy like the rest of conventional US culture, noting that queer-identified transfolks (and kinksters, too) seem much more likely to have consensual non-monogamy as simply one of their many sexual identities, and generally do not focus on it as a defining characteristic.

The mainstream polyamorous community in the US is primarily composed of bisexuals and heterosexuals. Most of the men appear to be heterosexual, though homophobia is stronger against men so hiding bisexuality for men is not unusual.

"While non-monogamy is quite common and often fairly successful among gay men, rather few of them identify their relationships as polyamorous. Instead, regular gay male culture already has lots of room for negotiated non-monogamy so they generally don't need to join a polyamorous community," said Sheff.

And lesbians are similarly missing from the mainstream poly community, said Sheff, in part because they don't necessarily want to be competing with men for bisexual women's attention, and in part because they are generally not thrilled to spend time fending off male attention in poly communities where women are often considered bisexual until proven otherwise. Negotiated non-monogamy appears to be less popular among lesbians in general, but there is strong evidence for a self-contained lesbian polyamorous community that does not tend to intersect with the hetero/bi poly scene.

"The same things that make a polyamorous relationship thrive can contribute to happy, healthy monogamy



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(Source: www.sexdownsouth.com)

as well," said Sheff. "Two of the primary poly tools are communication and honesty, and those translate well to monogamy too."

Sheff said that communication allows people to think through and express their needs, and hopefully negotiate strategies to meet those needs in a way that works well for both or all partners. Honesty is similarly important in relationships, because it is crucial for trust and intimacy. For especially successful relationship outcomes, it is critical to be compassionate when communicating; honesty need not be brutal.

The conference will conclude on Saturday, October 17 with its exclusive Big Bang Event ball, featuring a seemingly endless evening of flirtatious revelry, erotic demonstrations, and deliciously diverse entertainment.

"We would like to see attendees grow from this experience," said Mosley and Stewart. "We would like for them to come out of this conference feeling refreshed, feeling knowledgeable,

feeling like they want to explore another facet of their sexuality and making sure that they try to feel as confident as possible to do so. We also want them to have fun and see where they can take their sexuality to the next level!"

Tickets begin at \$59 for a one-day pass. For more information, visit www.sexdownsouth.com



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Winnie McCroy is the Women on the EDGE Editor, HIV/Health Editor, and Assistant Entertainment Editor for EDGE Media Network, handling all women's news, HIV health stories and theater reviews throughout the U.S. She has contributed to other publications, including The Village Voice, Gay City News, Chelsea Now and The Advocate, and lives in Brooklyn, New York.

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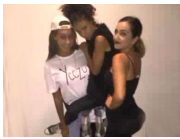
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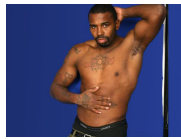
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