

## Helping Women Find Sexual Liberation

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Jennifer Jolicoeur is in the business of helping women feel sexy and take control of their sexuality. She is the founder and president of Athena's Home Novelties ([www.athenashn.com](http://www.athenashn.com)), a company that throws home "toy" parties for adults.

When I arrive at their Woonsocket offices, I meet first with marketing director Craig Jolicoeur. He takes me around the building, pointing out that unlike popular opinion about the adult novelty business, it's not porn. There aren't dirty pictures on the walls or in the halls. Instead, the small company looks like any other business, though the shades of purple on the wall and smell of incense radiate a very relaxing vibe.

He hands me a catalog, purposely without product photos, and explains that a network of sales professionals, known as Goddesses, give presentations in the comfort of your own living room. They sell just about everything you could imagine finding in a typical adult store, from vibrators to videos, but the consumers are not who you might think they are.

The parties resemble a Tupperware gathering, in that about a dozen women congregate in the hostess' house and learn about the merchandise for sale. But the comparison ends there. The goods for sale are meant to enhance your sexual goddess within, not your domestic one.

"You don't have to wear a trench coat and dark glasses to come to an Athena's party," says Jennifer. The parties are run for women by women who have been trained to understand the products, anatomy, and how the two can work together to enhance a couple's and individual's sex life. And the majority of her customers, she adds, are average women like, say, soccer moms, who have not been sexually liberated.

The feminine force behind the business is apparent in the entire company and especially in Jennifer's office. As I listen to her explain her job, I can't help but glance around. All the typical executive-type things are here: the roomy space includes a large, wooden desk; a computer; pictures of her husband and children; piles of papers and other reminders you are indeed in an office. There are also unexpected things. Several *Star Wars* dolls sit on her shelf, a few of which are in the original packaging, a collector I suspect. The room houses an old fireplace where incense and candles burn, filling the room with a soft fragrance, reminiscent of the boudoir.

When I ask why she does what she does, her answer comes as no surprise. She believes her company fills a niche that was missing just a few years ago. Before then, the adult industry was very masculine in nature. And aside from very few places, such as local retailer Miko Exoticwear, the stores had a dirty feel to them.

After attending a party given by a similar company many years ago, she decided to become a sales rep and took her message of female sexuality and sensuality to the masses. But the company disbanded not too long after, but by then she knew she had a mission. So she left behind a well-paying corporate job at a nationally known retailer and started Athena's.

Her decision was initially greeted with a *you're going to do what?* response from friends and family who didn't think that women would ever attend sex toy parties. Now, five years later she has 224 Goddesses working as distributors in 22 states.

She again brings up the Tupperware reference to explain her parties. The Goddess arrives at the host home armed with a goody bag full of products and most importantly a sense of fun. She encourages the hosts to set up a cozy space to allow for a very girl talk inducing setting.

Unlike what you may be thinking, the parties aren't a free-for-all with women taking vibrators for test runs in the back. Nor is it a dry educational seminar like an 8<sup>th</sup> grade health class. Instead, the Goddess mixes anatomy lessons with information on how the products can enhance your sex life – with or without a partner. Guests learn about the products themselves, how to take care of them, and how to introduce them to a partner. If so inclined, you can pick them up and turn them on.

If you attend a party you may also notice that the language is more science textbook than X-rated. The vagina and surrounding area is explained, so too is the anal area, but not with giggles and slang. It's much closer to the dialogue on *ER* rather than *Sex and the City*.

If you're wondering what Athena's top sellers are, they are an egg shaped vibrator called the "Silver Bullet" and a shave cream designed for sensitive areas. Because, as Jennifer points out, "the skin is the largest sex organ."