

# Sex toys: the new tupperware?

by Tamara Walker

Seedy, sleazy and exploitive – this is the reputation the adult “sex-toy” industry tends to have.

But religious groups, psychologists, consumers and those in the sex-toy industry say times are changing. And so are people's attitudes.

There has been a liberal shift towards acceptance of all things sexual, says Auckland University senior psychology lecturer Virginia Braun.

“Sexual pleasure has taken a status as a good thing. Therefore things that bring pleasure, such as sex-toys, are seen positively.”

Michelle Laurie, owner of adult store Loving Touch, says every generation tends to have a more open-minded attitude towards sexuality than the previous one.

“We're in the midst of a change right now – every woman of every age wants to give new things a go,” she says.

Religious attitudes are changing as well.

Rev Clay Nelson of St Matthew-in-the-City says Christianity has traditionally been opposed to sexuality for anything other than procreation.

“But many have moved beyond this view,” he says.

“Sexuality is a perfectly natural and healthy part of humanity. It's a gift from God.

“We need to be responsible about that gift, but it's not something to be condemned. It's something to be celebrated,” he says.

He says he does not have any moral concerns with an increasingly popular part of the sex-toy industry: sex-toy parties.

He says the industry will raise moral concerns only if it involves taking away people's freedom, imposing control over others against their will, or abusing human rights.

Laurie says there has been a marked increase in popularity over the last three years. Her company currently holds 50 to 80 parties in the Auckland area each month.

Another adult store, D.Vice Designer Sex Gear, says the demand for parties increases by about 10 per cent each year.

Company director Ema Lyons says the parties are so popular that weekends are generally booked out six weeks in advance.

And although the parties mainly attract a female audience, her company has a broad client base.



“We cater for all genders, ethnicities and sexualities,” she says.

Lyons says the concept began in the 1970s when the occasional sex-toy started appearing at women's lingerie parties.

Under the D.Vice philosophy, sex-toy parties provide “quality sex gear for adventurous everyday people”.

But sex-toys and their parties are not just about having a good time. They also promote safe sex and attempt to break stereotypes and normalise sex-toys so they are not seen as perverted.

Braun says the parties can play an important and healthy role in society.

She says they provide opportunities to discuss and learn about sexuality in a comfortable environment.

Braun, Lyons and Laurie say the home environment and social framework of the parties is conducive to people having a positive experience.

Sarah-Jane Puch and Lizzie Blaunt recently held a D.Vice party for their friends.

“I think to have a party like that in your house – a safe environment – and to have everything out in the open is great,” Puch says.

Blaunt adds that the party offered a “really nice atmosphere to look and buy sex-toys that wasn't threatening.”

“It provided a nice forum where you can ask questions and learn a bit,” she says.

Despite today's more liberal attitudes to the sex-toy industry and the potential

healthy role it can play, Braun warns it can be a double-edged sword.

“Sex-toy parties can have an associated shock or novelty factor, which reinforces the idea that sex is somewhat taboo, naughty or not serious,” she says.

There is also concern that the parties will commercialise sexuality.

This means that an average person may feel the need to buy certain goods in order to have a full sex life.

She also says that, while attitudes in society are more liberal today, “this doesn't necessarily reflect the reality for many people.”

In a sign of the times, this year's “Boobs on Bikes” parade attracted a record number of spectators.

## Last of CBD's bush a 'gem' for Auckland

by Craig Borley

Auckland Domain's stand of bush is an ever improving gem going unnoticed by most of the city's residents, according to one long-time walker.

Rolf Petersen spends every lunch hour he can wandering along the bush's tracks, but is surprised he is usually alone.

“The bush seems to be getting better, more realistic. But I've walked through it for a few years and there's pretty much just me here most days,” he says.

“You see the odd jogger and some tourists, but I don't think many locals come here.”

Working as a consultant means he is often in different parts of the city, but he says the domain bush is as tranquil as anywhere in Auckland.

“It's just a good place to get away for a few minutes, get some quiet and some fresh air.”

Just a few hundred years ago Auckland's isthmus and Queen St valley were covered in dense bush. They are now covered in dense cityscapes, but the bushy pocket on the sloping northern corner of Auckland Domain has held out.

And its future is looking good. A weed-ridden mess just a decade ago, the bush is healthier than ever after a decade of intensive weeding, according to Auckland City Council parks officer Graham Marchant.

“We've got the citywide weed management plan that includes this area, and we have done planting – we do some every year.”

He says \$57,000 is allocated each year to the improvement of the bush and its adjoining areas.

Auckland War Memorial Museum botanist Rhys Gardner says the council's work has been effective.

“It's been pretty well weeded over the

last decade, it used to have a lot of weeds.”

He says before the arrival of humans, and flora from foreign continents, the slopes would have looked quite different.

“There would have been very impressive forests going down those slopes as it's north facing. There would have been puriri, kauri dominating on the ridges, and swamps in the valleys.”

But the bush is still invaluable to Auckland, says Ewen Cameron, curator of botany at the museum.

He believes the bush-covered slopes are one of Auckland city's shining jewels, and are important for its health.

“The lungs of the city are in these green areas,” Cameron says.

“It's never going to be pure native, it's not going to be as grand as the Waitakeres, but it's been pretty well managed.”

As well as the weeding, there is also a programme of selective exotic tree

removal, a tricky business as some of the exotics are mature trees, he says.

“If you just chop out the bigger exotics all at once, so much light will come through for the weed's seedlings as to be counter-productive.”

But the bush is still of inestimable value, Cameron says.

“Purely because it's there. Its scarcity value will only increase, and there are very few stands of broadleaf forest in the city.”

“At the same time as it provides a look at what the original forest cover was like, it also provides a contrast to the urban environment.”

Gardner says despite the exotics and the bush's lack of patronage, it is still a great asset to the city.

“It remains very, very diverse,” he says. “I can remember some quite big banded Kokupu coming right up the stream there. That's quite amazing right in the city.”