

Not yo' average **triple-x**

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by **Sara Liane Irvine**

It's not your average sex store. "Womyns' Ware, to us, is a political statement," Jenna Sylvest explains as we comfortably lounge on the couches in her lavender office. Her dog, a black Lab, wanders over and sits on my feet, nuzzling my arms in hope of some affection.

In fact, Womyns' Ware, co-owned by Sylvest and Otter Louis, isn't a sex store at all.

Rather, as Jenna says, it is "a women's sexuality store." Lacking the pornography, penis pumps, and tin-foiled windows associated with triple-X stores, Womyns' Ware has a unique mandate—to promote the celebration and empowerment of women's sexuality.

When Sylvest, a UBC alumni, founded Womyns' Ware with Louis in 1995, she realised the difficulty in acquiring high-quality sexual products for women.

Silicone is the best material for penetrative products, which form a large component of Womyns' Ware's stock. Being expensive and labour-intensive, most of the mainstream sexual industry does not offer silicone products because, as Sylvest points out, "XXX stores are not really an industry about women at all." Instead, she says, they are focused on bringing in revenue.

The dog wanders back to Sylvest, and as she gently pets her, Sylvest explains that Womyns' Ware seeks to "promote women's sexuality as something that is distinct from male sexuality."

This is a welcome change from the pervasive correlation between woman and sexiness. "A sexy woman is one that a man finds attractive," states Sylvest, "as opposed to a sexual woman, who is a woman who has her own sexual power...it's her power base to use, not be used for."

Sylvest explains how the loss of virginity is defined as the passing of the penis through



NEVER LIMP These female-shaped dills guarantee a night of great lovin', Kar Yan Cheung Photo

the hymen, and not with a woman having an orgasm. Women's sexuality, she says, is defined not in terms of what makes women sexual, but in terms of what is done to them. Womyns' Ware tries to break this assumption.

In our society, the mention of women's sexuality can invoke many negative connotations—dirty, filthy, receptacles, and sluts—which are a product of our society's tradition of sexually restricting women. Sylvest says that "if you can control a person's sexual expression, everything else is easy because being sexual is such a comelpl to being a human being."

But unfavourable images of women's sexuality have no place in Womyns' Ware.

Art adorns the walls and shelves upon shelves of sexual products including dills of every colour and shape imagined, glistening anal beads, flavoured lubes, imaginative S&M gear, and a variety of condoms, dams, and gloves. Sylvest stresses that at Womyns' Ware, "we see women's sexuality as sacred."

Womyns' Ware is classified by City Hall as a "retail store" rather than an "adult entertainment" store, something Sylvest and Louis fought hard for. "Sex products can be treated like any consumer good," says Sylvest, rather than as an extension of the porn industry.

Womyn's Ware seeks to dismantle the taboo surrounding sexual expression. Whether a woman would like to experience her first orgasm, impress people at an orgy, or expand her sexual experiences with her partner, Womyn's Ware employees help find the product suited for each customer. Using diagrams and instruction books, Womyns' Ware educates its customers on how products interact with anatomy. Products are displayed out of their boxes, and customers can examine each one while deciding which suits their needs. Hands-on, informative education like this is unequalled.

The dog goes over to greet Louis, who has just come in. This "sexual therapy dog," as Sylvest and Louis lovingly refer to her as, relaxes many a nervous customer. Sexually empowered rather than sexualised, women and their partners benefit from all that Womyns' Ware has to offer.®