



NEWS

What's the buzz?

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Sex toy on sale at local retail chain puzzles some as experts debate social outcome

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They come in four different personalities, each designed with women in mind.

The Tennis Coach, for instance, is "sculpted and fit" and promises to "take very specific aim".

The Millionaire, on the other hand, is a "classic gentleman and an all-rounder" who is here to "pleasure you like the princess you are".

They are "personal massagers" — also known as vibrators — for women. Each comes in a different colour and is represented by a simple cartoon character.

Made by Swedish brand Smile Makers, which comes under the company Ramblin' Brands, these vibrators are the first to be sold by a major retail chain in Singapore.

Launched on Wednesday, they are exclusively available in health and beauty care store Watsons Singapore island-wide and its online store.

Not everyone was aware of what they are.

When shown the discreet package yesterday, a 57-year-old woman in Toa Payoh asked: "Is it perfume?"

When told that the box contains a vibrator, all she said was: "Oh." She then stared at the packaging for a few seconds, looking confused.

After the woman, who declined to be named, finally figured out what it does, she said it was not up to her to decide whether such vibrators should be sold in mainstream stores.

"It may be not okay for my generation, but it may be okay for the younger generation," she added.

Another woman, who wanted to be known as Lisa, told The New Paper the packaging looks like that of a children's toy.

But the 32-year-old did not oppose the sale of the vibrators in Watsons.

"It is okay to let people have a choice, like how condoms are displayed in public," said the mother of a five-year-old girl.

She does not think the sale of the vibrators will be a bad influence on teenagers.

"I wouldn't call it a danger. It is up to parents to explain to their children if they ask about it," she said.

Mr Walter Lim, 45, who has an 11-year-old boy, agreed the issue is not about where the vibrators are sold but rather about educating the young.

"I think parents should inculcate the right values and morals in their children. The children would then be able to differentiate between right and wrong irrespective of their environment," he said.

Their views echoed the results of a TNP online poll which shows 78 per cent of respondents were not concerned that the vibrators were available in Watsons. (See report above.)

Ramblin' Brands co-founder Mattias Hulting said the company chose to sell its products in Watsons to normalise the sexual wellness category.

Watsons Singapore general manager Daniel Teo quoted a recent study that indicated six in 10 women here are open to buying a vibrator.

He hopes to cater to this group with the Smile Makers vibrators. (See report at right.)

TNP checked out two Watsons stores — in Clementi and Toa Payoh.

In the Clementi store, the vibrators were displayed on the top and bottom tiers of the family planning section.

In Toa Payoh, they were tucked at the bottom shelf below where condoms are displayed. They are also displayed on shelves behind the cashier's counter.

With its simple packaging of white and pastel, it is easy to miss these vibrators if one does not look specifically for it.

When this reporter asked a male cashier about the functions of the vibrator, he simply handed a package from the shelf behind him.

"For women," he said awkwardly, before lowering his gaze to the cash register immediately.

Experts contacted by The New Paper were divided over the sale of vibrators at family-friendly stores.

Adjunct Associate Professor **Lynda Wee** from the Nanyang Technological University said a vibrator need not be sold at visible areas as it is an "intended or planned buy".

Adding that it could make others "uncomfortable", Prof Wee, who specialises in retail management, said shoppers would buy a vibrator through low-profile methods.

"(The vibrators) should not be at public places," she said.

Associate Professor Daniel Goh, a sociologist at the National University of Singapore (NUS), does not see why anyone would object to the sale of the vibrators.

"In any case, vibrators are for private usage and there are no public health and issues associated with it... What form could the objections take?"

Rather than a measure of Singaporeans' open-mindedness, the vibrators are about "the line between private and public and the norms concerning it", he added.

"It really isn't anyone's business to police private matters that have no bearing on public health and issues," he said.

But fellow NUS sociologist Tan Ern Ser said he would not be surprised if complaints or unhappiness surface over the vibrators.

"The fact is if we have 40 per cent of conservatives, including concerned parents, among Singaporeans... It doesn't take a lot of people to make a loud complaint in the media, including social media," he said.

(The vibrators) should not be at public places. Respect the mass.

— Adjunct Associate Professor **Lynda Wee** from the Nanyang Technological University, who specialises in retail management

...vibrators are for private usage and there are no public health and issues associated with it... What form could the objections take?

— Associate Professor Daniel Goh, a sociologist at the National University of Singapore

CUTE: There are four designs — each with a different colour and represented by a cartoon character.

DISCREET: At the two Watsons outlets The New Paper visited, the vibrators were displayed in the family planning section or behind the cashier's counter.

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Region	All Regions
Language	All Languages
Results Found	14
Timestamp	25 April 2015 18:40