

Let's Go To Miko

(You know you want to...)

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Who hasn't noticed this little store on Wickenden Street? The one that calls itself "your friendly neighborhood sex shop?" Some have ventured in; some have been in enough times to feel comfortable there. For those who haven't yet given it a try, take heart. This reporter has boldly paved the way for you.

The first thing that needs to be mentioned about Miko is the feel of the place. If you have been in one of the other sex shops in



Providence, you may be chuckling at the mere mention of the "feel" of such a store. Miko, however, is a very pretty shop. Welllit, spotless and attractively set up, it has the feel of a cute little gift shop or boutique. It is the kind of shop you've been in before.

Upon entering the store, one is, to use the words of the store manager, hit by lingerie. There is, quite literally, something for everyone in this product line. Nearby there are shelves with lubricants, followed by a variety of vibrators. Along the walls are videos and books, and the farther one ventures, the less innocent the products become, from strap-ons to leather cuffs. It is safe to say that Miko has what you need, and what they may lack in multiplicity they make up for in the care with which they choose their merchandise. And if you can't find what you are looking for, chances are good they can order it for you.

The most significant arena in which Miko shines, however, is not found on the store shelves. It is embedded in the shop's ethic. It is a mission with these folks to help their customers create a healthy relationship with their sexuality. The staff at Miko is proud to provide a safe space to explore sexuality. All the toys have testers on the shelves and the staff people are well-versed in how the products work. In addition, the Miko staff is trained in how to help the customer feel comfortable – they will not bother you if you want to browse, but they are surprisingly warm and disarmingly helpful. There is absolutely no judgment here.

Staff

Miko is run by store manager Rhiannon Kopynec and educational director Megan Andelloux. Kopynec, a Brown University graduate, has worked in the field of women's sexuality for several years. She has facilitated a nationally replicated, student-run course on female sexuality. Her studies in and subsequent dedication to social entrepreneurship have resulted in a high level of social responsibility in the shop's approach to sex, sexuality and sexual health. Andelloux is a nationally certified Sexuality Educator, HIV Educator and a Board Certified Sexologist. She writes for the nationally acclaimed, award-winning Web site www.sexualhealth.org, and was presented with the "Vagina Warrior" award by the Vagina Monologues in 2006. She is the author of *We Got Issues: a Feminist Response to Cultural Attitudes on Feminism*.



Classes

Curious about what kinds of classes are offered at Miko? There are many to choose from. Some are free, including the one on talking to your kids about sex. There is one on menopause and sexuality, and even a do-it-yourself gynecology workshop. For a fee of \$25-\$40, you can catch a class in anal or strap-on sex, one for men called "Gentlemen, Start

Your Engines," with a corresponding one for the ladies called "Stroking the Kitty." The classes, while interactive and hands-on, are taught with clothes on -- instructors and students alike. The one on female oral sex involves practicing on a mango. "You should have mango juice all over your face by the end!" laughs the instructor. Classes are popular with the over-50 set, and their best source of new members is word of mouth; Andelloux says that many participants arrive having been told by friends, "You just have to check out this class!"

Community

In addition to the services offered at the shop, the Miko Sexuality Learning and Resource Center reaches out to the Rhode Island health community, providing information to area hospitals and other medical providers. They have conducted workshops helping providers to be sex-positive and sensitive to the Transgender and BDSM communities, and are available to give presentations to colleges and universities, women's health and advocacy groups and others. Known for medical accuracy, their workshops have received local and national recognition.

The Miko store focuses mainly on products for women and couples, but not entirely. "We love boys, too," says Andelloux, pointing to the ample selection of men's underwear among other things. What is perhaps most common among their customers is their tendency toward shyness on their first visit, a tendency that gradually dissipates over time, according to the staff. "We don't use euphemisms," says Kopynec, "and we do embrace awkwardness. We recognize and acknowledge embarrassment in a way that creates a level of comfort."

It is refreshing to visit a sex shop whose windows are not blacked out, that does not have viewing booths in the basement, and that prides itself on how carefully the products are

chosen, with an eye to safety, health, and positive messages. “We love boys, too,”

“We love boys, too”

For instance, says Andelloux, “We try to stay away from videos that include negative images of women.” So if you are in the market for sex toys (perhaps a Cadbury Cream flavored dental dam?) or some good, sex-positive information, a visit to this charming shop might be in your future.

Miko is located at 268 Wickenden Street in Providence. They can be reached at 421-9787 or on the web at www.mikolrc.org . ▼