

LELO

**A Futurist view into
the future of love, sex,
and relationships**

**LELO report on trends
in the following decades**

Introduction

Fifty years back, the story seemed that much easier as sexual wellness was inextricably connected to marriage and starting a family. Since then, we have seen a fair bit of change in the way we think about sex and relationships. And with technology influencing our lives more and more, LELO looks into how sex, intimacy, and relationships might evolve in the next couple of decades. By talking to experts in the field - Tom Cheeswright, applied futurologist, and Kate Moyle, LELO sex expert and certified therapist - LELO created the Report on future sex and relationships, one of the first such trend reports in the industry.

The aim of the futurist point of view

Futurism is about exploring possibilities. It's a way of envisioning different futures and preparing for them. This field has evolved from simply trying to forecast trends to understanding the vast possibilities of the future. Adopting a futuristic view is a way to manage the future, not just forecast it. In a world where change is the only constant, anticipating future trends is crucial to offer people tools and perspectives to help them navigate the unknown.



Is technology helping or hindering people?

If years of predicting trends in sexual wellness have taught us at LELO anything, it is that sexual wellness will be the foundation from which all future sex trends stem. What we are witnessing is a continued shift in attitudes towards sex and people being more flexible and open-minded in matters that pertain to their intimate lives. Experts believe that this new sexual liberation will be reflected through normalizing sexual acts, desires, and attitudes that have previously gone unnoticed or unspoken. But there is another factor. Technology.

Unsurprisingly, technology is a huge factor. It has been impacting all aspects of our lives, and intimacy and relationships are no exception. Still, many people will laugh off the idea that tech plays a part in intimate life. This is partly due to our culture, which has a very narrow definition of intimacy and sex. In the eyes of many, only private parts touching is usually considered to be real sex, instead of viewing the physical aspect of sex as a natural follow-up to erotic energy, feeling sexy and channeling it, and releasing this energy, solo or with a partner.

For many people, intimacy is all about feeling connected, and technology is seen as only enhancing this feeling of being connected. This affects only the lives of Millennials and Gen Z. Still, with rapid advances in robotics and AI, mainly since the pandemic, we have all found new,

innovative, and safe ways to connect intimately and sexually through technology.

No matter how one feels about the prospect of human-tech relationships, one thing seems inevitable. In a world where sex toys are digitally operated and give feedback, in a culture permeated with online porn to the extent it is a legitimate business model, in a time when people are forging relationships through apps, the truth is that in a few years, almost everyone will be participating in this reality to some extent. Whether those delving into deeper relationships through immersive technologies and altogether shunning the need for human interaction will ever form a group large enough to be considered anything but a group of a few curious individuals remains to be seen. But with all that we know about the evolution of human relationships since the dawn of ages until now, it seems like a real possibility that, at some point, this will become another sexual identity.

Like many times in history, people are redefining human intimacy and connections by turning to technology for their emotional and physical needs and by creating safe spaces for themselves this way and abstaining from the need to engage in real-life interactions.

Technology has altered the way we approach dating, friendship, and family. It is redefining the very core of our lives. In the process, it deprives us of real-life social bonds and unwittingly leaves more and more people feeling lonely, even isolated. By being connected at the touch of a button, technology creates an illusion we are connected to the world, when in fact, the constant communication through various tools and platforms without actually engaging emotionally and sometimes even harming the very purpose for which it was created. Still, people will always continue forging connections as we know now, but the endless possibilities will generate another set of options that we, at this point, consider alternatives to relationships.

So, what do experts have to say?

As we get closer and closer to 2025, it's hard not to look back and reflect on how radically things have changed in a short period. Twenty-five years ago, the world was completely different than today - we feared that a computer programming shortcut could cause extensive havoc at the beginning of 2000. The world changed less significantly from the 1950s until the end of the millennium than it has since 2000 until today. The past two decades have been marked by incredible progress and innovation, and this is not always easy to process.

Nothing about sex and relationships is easy, even in the simplest of times, and judging from the extreme speed with which our lives are changing, it is to be expected that these have an exciting and complex process of change ahead of them. Adjusting to these changes will require some preparation. Also, there is always more to learn about sex and relationships, even if you are a titan in the sexual wellness industry. For this reason, we asked the professionals for their predictions on what the future has in store for us.

Relationships and sex (wellness) trends for the future of sex: a futurist view



APPLIED FUTURIST
Tom
Cheesewright

Being asked about the future of sex is a challenging brief for a futurist. Most of our professional work is very bounded. The organisations who approach us are usually interested in their own future, rather than everyone's future. So we can narrow down our exploration based on their specific interests, pressures, and opportunities.

Sex, by contrast, is so universal that trying to explore its future can be overwhelming. It touches every aspect of our lives, from conception, to relationships, food, politics, design, marketing and more.

So in exploring the future of sex, we have to be thoughtful about our approach. Futurism isn't about plucking ideas from the air. It's about structured thinking, using data and process to direct your understanding of what might be.



The Approach

In this case, I used a modified Scenario Planning process. Starting with some of today's prevailing trends I stretched them out to the fifty year horizon and imagined how the world might look at that point if those trends persist, in the uneven way that trends tend to do.

Then I took that baseline scenario and bent it in three different directions to see how sex might look under those scenarios.

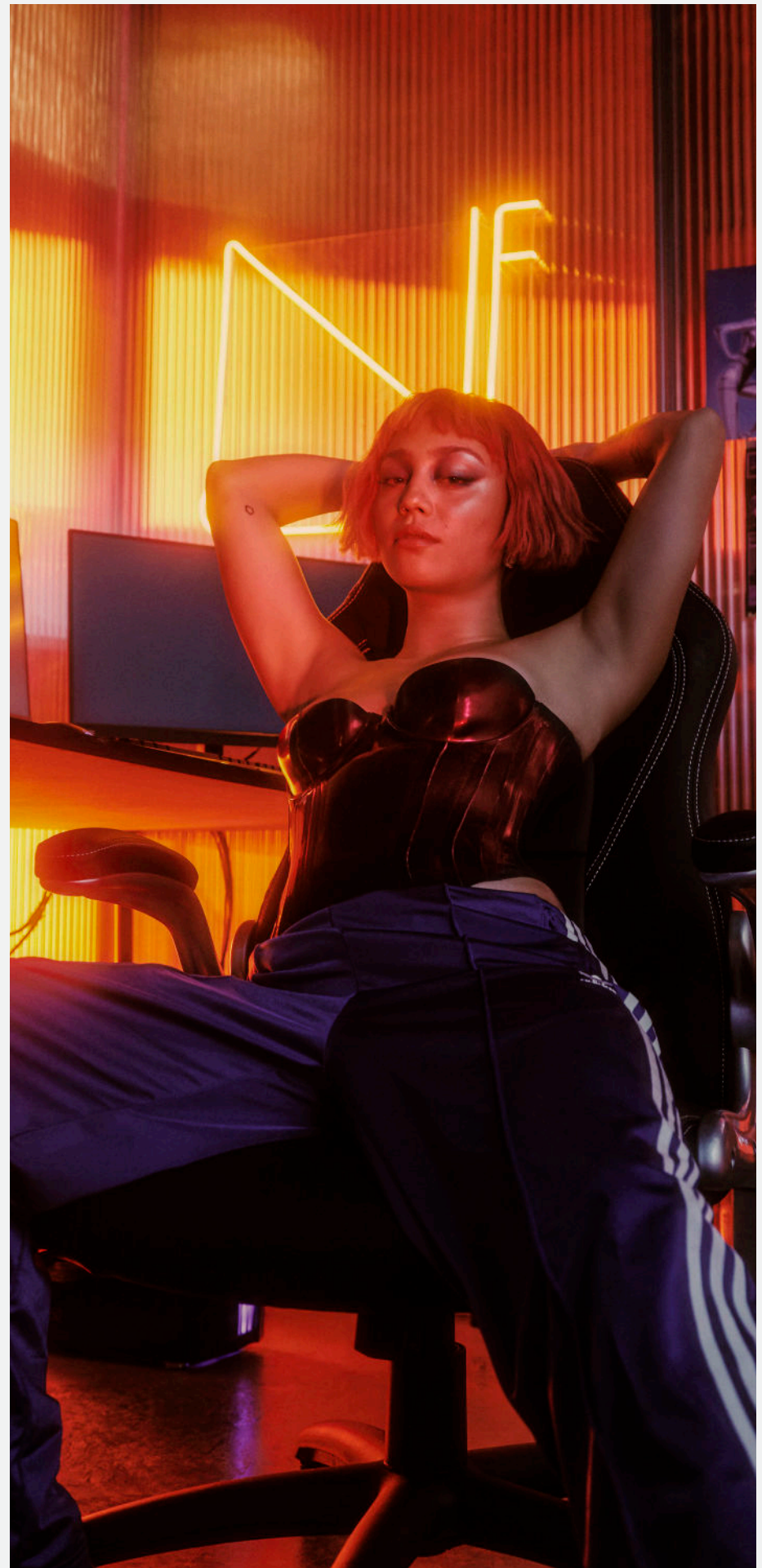
These can be described very briefly as follows:

Digital Unbound: Humanity pursues our digital endeavours without limit, with all the advantages and disadvantages that confers: 10 hrs a day in mixed reality, AI avatars near indistinguishable from humans, loneliness and separation, underemployment, and likely lots of extreme fantasy roleplay.

Natural Focus: The digital backlash we're currently experiencing persists and drives a much more balanced approach to our relationship with other people, and the planet. We place a high value on human interaction, empathy, and physical contact. Craft becomes a critical industry with a high focus on human-made goods and personalisation.

Resurgent Traditionalism: Pop culture and politics come together to drive a return to historical gender roles, and attitudes. False nostalgia, 'tradwives' and government incentives designed to restore declining birth rates create a very different sexual climate.

I tried to imagine the answer to the questions posed to me by LELO under these four scenarios, then aggregated the answers to try to find some probabilities that were the most interesting to explore.



**These are what you
will find in this
Report.**

Relationships and sex trends for the future

Science drives greater satisfaction

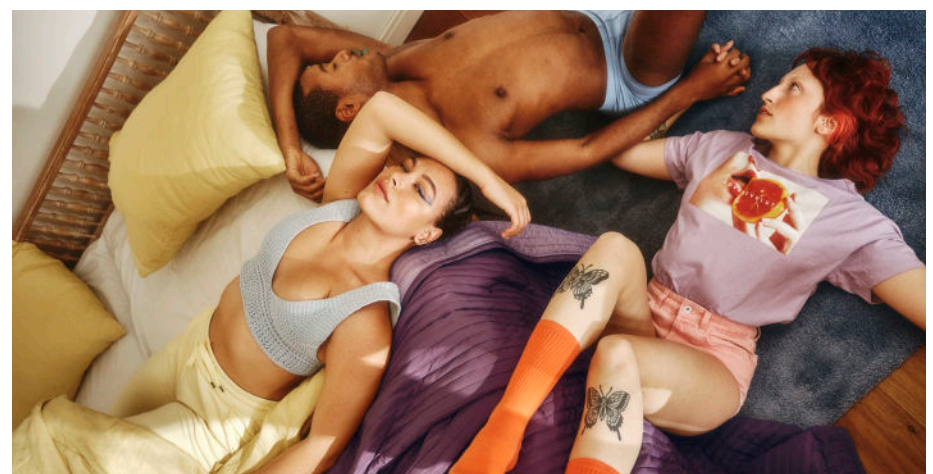
We always overestimate how much we understand about the world around us. Not least, how much we understand about the functioning of the human body. The rate of advancement in medical science is incredible right now, and in 50 years we'll understand a lot more.

We can turn that understanding into new cures and prevention, but we can also turn it to the enhancement of pleasure. As research translates first into changes in technology, and behaviour, we should be able to expect safer and more satisfying sexual experiences. New ways of stimulating our nerves, new understandings of how pleasure is communicated through our bodies and brains, and new ways of enhancing and extending it.

Leisure sex: friends with benefits

In most wealthy countries, people are settling down, getting married, and having children later and spending much of their 20s and early 30s single. While the data on sexual promiscuity is mixed, we can imagine (optimistically) that there might have been some softening of rather persistent attitudes towards having multiple partners, particularly for women, in fifty years.

For those outside of a relationship, we might see more of a decoupling between sex and commitment. Sex is good for us, and the more we come to understand that, the more 'friends with benefits' might be a much more normal arrangement, with greater acceptance of more nuanced tiers of interpersonal relationship. But the trend of delayed sexual experimentation is unlikely to reverse: these experiences will take place not in our early 20s but later, in our late 20s and early 30s. And it won't be for everyone.



Pride in Unselfishness

Status markers in our societies have been changing quite quickly in the recent past. A flashy car is as likely to get you dismissed as a poseur or climate destroyer as it is to garner the respect of your peers. Such markers have been replaced in part by noble life choices such as veganism, and social media feeds full of incredible experiences, from festivals to incredible holidays.

How might this trend translate into future sexual behaviour? We might see sexual boasting take on a very different character. Less about how many partners you've had and more about how you made them feel. Though the unselfish pursuit of other people's pleasure stands to benefit us all, that doesn't mean we have to be doing it for the right reasons.



Will people have more or less sex in the future?

We'll have more partners - but not when we used to

Teenagers might be abstaining but we'll be more promiscuous in our 30s...and beyond

Multiple studies have shown that the youngest sexually active generation is having less sex and fewer partners. But this doesn't mean that across their whole lives this trend will persist. Rather, these data fit with the broader trend of 'extended adolescence' - a slower maturation enabled by our extended lifespans but also enforced by the economic and social environment that this generation has entered, with its low tolerance for risk and challenging access to home ownership.

Instead of the period of frantic coupling in our youth before settling down, we're more likely to have more partners later in life as we grow in confidence and personal development. Some in our later 20s and early thirties, as we're seeking a long term partner. And likely more later in our lives when our first, second, or third long term relationships have ended.

We'll have less sex with our current partner

Netflix and chill...without the chill

Five years ago, Netflix famously noted that its biggest competitor was not other streaming services, it was Fortnite. There is a lot of competition for our time these days and in fifty years there will be even more. Between work and the myriad entertainment options, even sex gets displaced.

But there is a positive counterpoint to this: we might have less sex, but we'll value it more. Like a live concert when most of your listening is to streamed music, or a face to face meeting on a working day full of video calls, sex will feel all the more valuable when we make time for it, and so we will invest in maximising the experience.



We'll have more sex in a virtual environment

Realistic elves and aliens replace nurses and firemen

The continuing integration of technology into our daily lives will see us spending the majority of our days in a semi-digital environment. Likely a mixed reality, this will feature digital objects, avatars and artificial intelligences projected into our physical surroundings via smart glasses or lenses. Inevitably, there will be a huge amount of sexual content.

This creates interesting opportunities. To date, most of the exploration of virtual reality in a sexual context has been for immersive pornography. But the integration of physical and digital creates new possibilities. We can rewrite our surroundings for the ultimate fantasy roleplay - even redrawing our partners, which offers some worrying possibilities. We can build characters around toys, robots and AIs. There will be a lot of temptation.



Will humans enter into relationships with robots in the future?



Robots will be super-sophisticated, but they won't be 'alive'

Do you really want a programmable sex partner?

In 50 years we likely won't have produced a robot that we can genuinely class as conscious, though by then we might have a better definition of what consciousness is. However, we will absolutely be able to create a robot that offers a very close facsimile of life, at least in a limited set of circumstances.

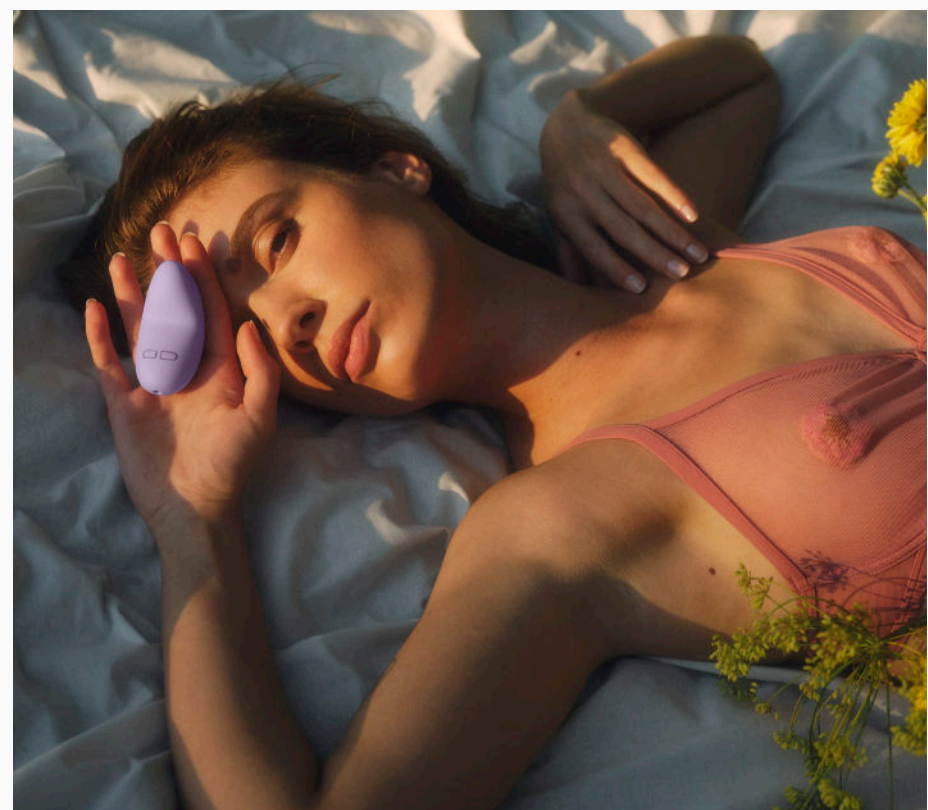
This creates a definitional problem: what is a relationship if one participant remains to all intents and purposes, an object, subject to the instructions of someone else? Relationships are important in part because they challenge us, force us to negotiate and compromise. Because of their imperfections. Robots won't challenge us, unless we tell them to.

We already make friends with inanimate objects

You might have a platonic crush on your robot postie

The counterpoint to this is that we already have very deep connections with inanimate objects. We imbue objects with a sense of personality. We anthropomorphise and imagine their responses. Everything from stuffed toys to cars.

In 50 years there will be a lot more robots around, and they will have a lot of personality - albeit one that is programmed into them. We will interact with them frequently, whether they are working alongside us, delivering our parcels, or helping to look after us as we age. The chances are we will treat a lot of these robots as if they are alive. And we might consider ourselves in a relationship with some of them, even if it's not sexual.



Inevitable, if not healthy

Robot regulations might be required

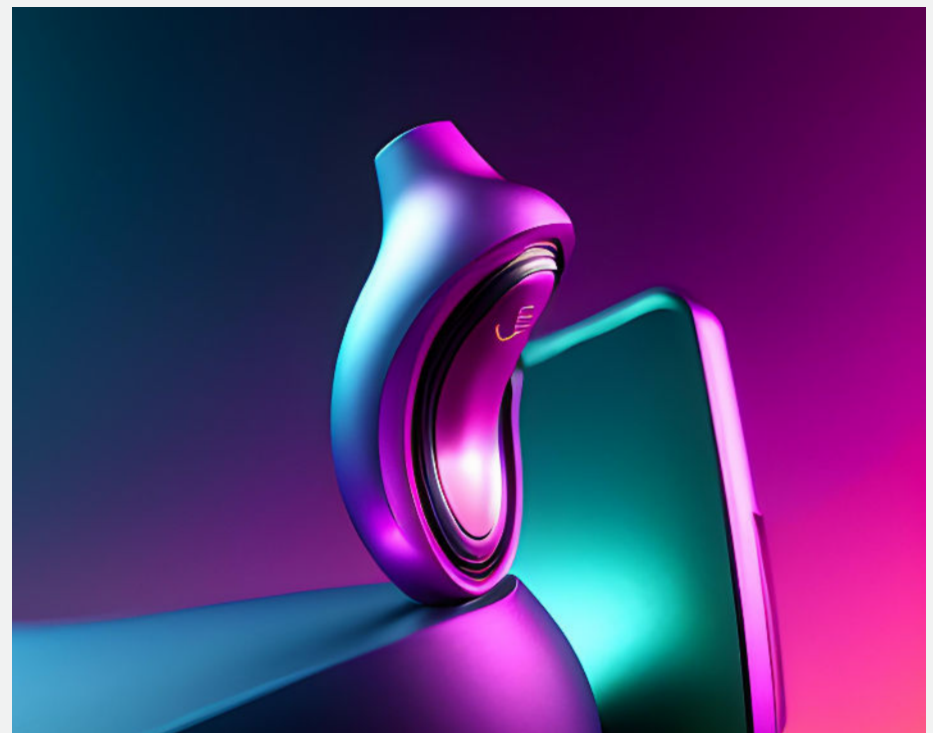
Even with the technology at a relatively rudimentary level today, there are people who treat their sex dolls like a life partner. As the technology evolves and becomes more accessible, it seems inevitable that more people will have sexual experiences with robots.

But we should be cautious about them becoming mainstream. With their inherent submissiveness and unlimited body shape possibilities, robots could reinforce unrealistic ideas about human partners, or allow people to rehearse dangerously extreme fantasies.



How will sex toys/sex toy brands evolve in the future

New materials for pleasure



Beyond vibration, future toys could move in more organic ways

One of the most exciting areas of scientific research right now is in materials. Our understanding of the smallest molecules of matter is allowing us to create new materials with incredible properties - not just look and feel, but an ability to move, change shape, and store energy.

This creates endless possibilities for future sex toys that take advantage of our growing understanding of human pleasure. Toys will feel more natural, move in more organic ways, and very rarely need recharging!

Storytelling toys

Connected sex toys will respond to your virtual fantasies

Future sex toys will be increasingly connected, and not just to a simple remote control. With fantasy environments delivered through mixed reality, we will want our toys to react in ways that make sense in the context of the story we're experiencing, giving sensations in line with the actions of the real or virtual characters with whom we're interacting. They'll move in the right way, react with the right motion and force, and time their buildup with the narrative arc.

Toys for Two

No more worries that you're not enough if your partner wants to get a toy involved

If we do take more pride in unselfish sexual behaviour in the future, that might also help to overcome any remaining sensitivities about toys for couples. And about toys in general.

That means being less concerned that using a toy together somehow says something negative about your own performance. And more broadly, being more open about their use. The end of incognito mode for online shopping?



Relationships and sex (wellness) trends for the future of sex: a sex therapist view



LELO UK SEX THERAPIST
Kate Moyle

As technology becomes an ever-increasing part of our lives and the more that people report struggling with in-person sex lives and interactions, we can predict that there will be a trend towards using our devices to facilitate more intimate in person connections. Taking apps and products for couples and people in relationships which can assist couples in initiating intimacy, and communicating about sex whilst offering a focus for developing sex as a skill. Sex education, communication prompts and guides with follow along and guided content, will facilitate the further breaking down of the stigma around sex lives as people are able to access from their pockets at any time. Like the societal and social shift in the conversation around sex toys and pleasure products, we can predict that as the shift in the acknowledgment of people using these type of products and apps becomes more normalized - using the technology that is causing barriers to solve them, then these will become more acknowledged as tools for relationship maintenance rather than just for those who are trying to solve relationship crises.

Will people have more or less sex in the future?

Currently we are seeing a trend for people reporting that they are having less sex year on year, and this has been consistently shown through the NATSAL Survey which is the biggest collection of data that we have on British sex lives and is conducted every 10 years. Currently the data shows that on average over the past two decades that there is a decrease in how often people say that they are having sex, however it must be considered that within this there may be a percentage of sexual experiences that may not be considered or strictly defined e.g. online sex, sexting, virtual sex; or differences in definitions when it comes to sex e.g. intercourse or non-penetrative sex and no inclusion of masturbation. What the data does show is that since the first survey in 1990-1991 there has been an increase in people aged 16-44 reporting that they have had same sex experiences, and that whilst in the 1990s both men and women reported an increase in number of opposite-sex partners, this number has only further increased for women over the last 20 years . We can predict this levelling out further as conversations around sexual education become more gender-equal and balanced, and social narratives and gender stereotypes about sex are further broken down.



How will technology continue to change our sex lives in future?

We know that our devices now play a dominant and multi-purposeful role in our lives in that they are everything from our alarm clocks, to online banking, navigation systems and baby monitors. Whilst this means that we struggle to escape our devices, which most often are a hindrance to our sex lives, we can expect to see a shift in using them to control our environments more with teledildonics and VR taking an increasing role as more of us travel, live separately and have sex virtually from different locations. The use of VR will allow people to engage in sex in different ways creating new environments and contexts which can help to facilitate a shift of mindset towards more desire and helping people to create environments to promote and trigger desire; which is something that people are currently reporting an increase in frequency in achieving - ironically partly to do with the inability to switch off from what else we have going on in life which our devices are constantly reminding us of.



How will sex toy brands evolve in the future?

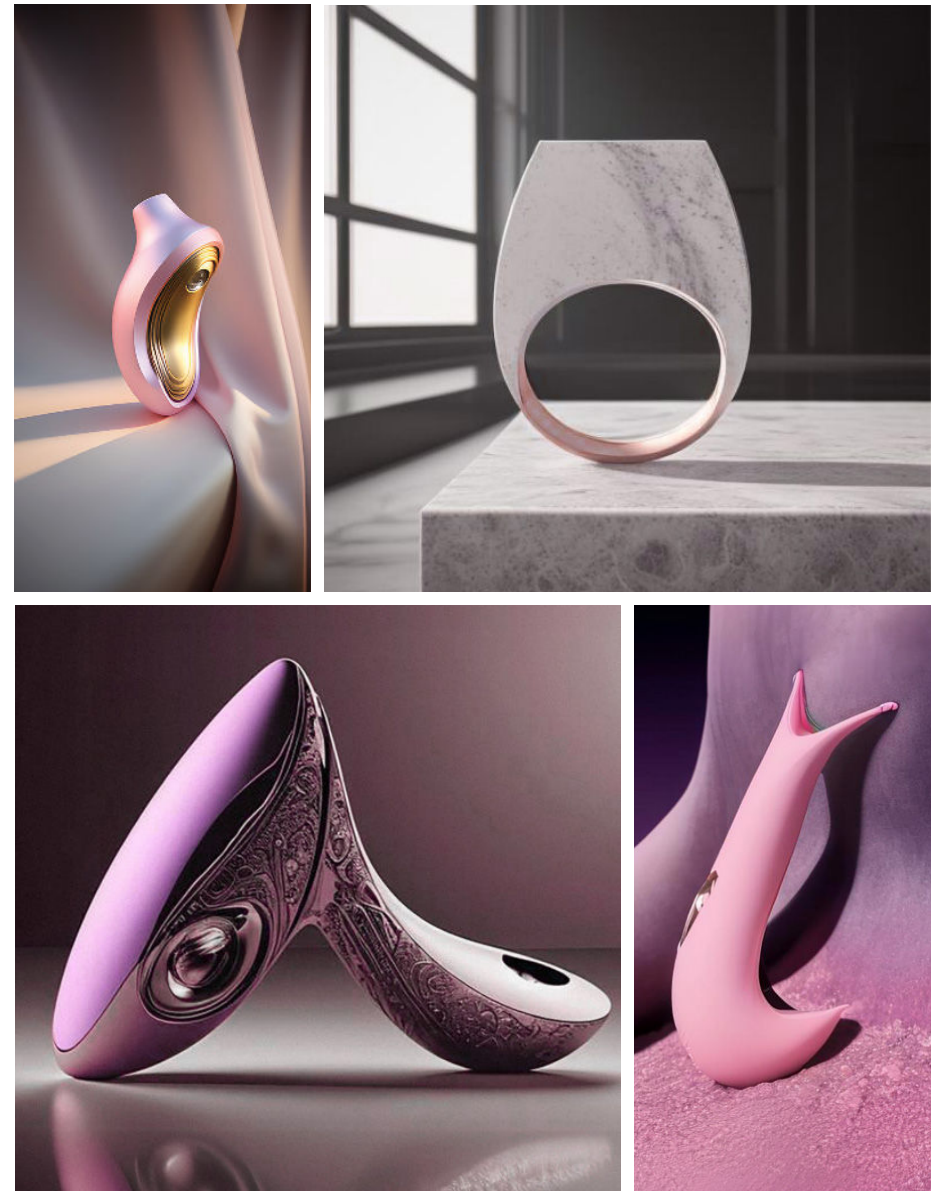
This rapid advancement of our technology and its functions won't be protected when it comes to our sex lives, and sex toys are likely to become more advanced and 'smart', measuring our pleasure and orgasms in an objective and data-driven way which will then increase their functionality and optimise pleasure and orgasms. This will demand sufficient laws and ethical considerations, in order to protect data and manage the privacy concerns of users. We can also expect to see a shift towards a wider range of sex toys for men as the conversation continues to shift to become more normalized - LELO has seen a consistent increase in sales of male sex toys and pleasure products with little marketing, but research from the brand still shows that of the men buying these products many are hesitant to discuss or admit to it.

Alongside this a wider range of products and more adaptability for those with disabilities will become increasingly important as innovation from within the space aims to tackle the deficits where this currently exists with toys being designed for increased sensuality and inclusivity. We are also likely to see even more development of toys without gender-specific functionality, which can be used for all bodies and experiences.

Relationships and sex (wellness) trends for the future of sex: sexual wellness brand view (conclusion)

The rise of technology is unstoppable, and it is both a blessing and a curse. It offers support but hinders genuine human connection, thus affecting mental wellness. For a long time now, we have known and openly talked about how sexual wellness and, consequently, sexual health have a positive bearing on physical, mental, emotional, and social well-being. In short, sexual health affects your overall quality of life. The trends in sexual wellness strongly indicate a shift in attitudes to being more flexible and open-minded regarding our sex lives. We see this reflected in the normalizing of sexual acts, desires, and attitudes previously hidden. It is a long way from the deeply rooted but outdated belief that sex is something that happens in our bodies and is solely a physical process. Having spent a better part of the last 20 years since its beginning gathering and learning from all the intel the brand gets from research and feedback from its users, LELO firmly believes that in the years to come, sex will become more of an experience and a journey, rather than just "satisfying an itch." And technology is here to enhance this journey.

Moreover, as sex expands to include tech, the advances in the fields of robotics and AI, and the impact these are having on our lives, it is easy to feel overwhelmed. Even frightened if we think about the not-so-distant future. It is essential to believe in humanity using these to improve lives. If we put fear aside, you will realize that these immersive technologies provide additional ways to reach and help people.



The future of sex toys according to AI

Technology will never be able to replace human connection fully. Still, new technologies can champion greater inclusion and support the human right to safely express and enjoy sexuality and have the choice to live a life with pleasure. This means technology will further destigmatize sex for even more groups of people, like the older population or people living with specific disabilities and dysfunction.

On the other hand, these advancements will also mean that there will have to be advancements in rules governing these technologies. Innovation and regulation go hand in hand. Innovation drives progress, and regulation ensures that innovation is safe and ethical. However, rapid technological advancements bring new challenges, especially in sex tech.

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LELO

20
YEARS
OF PLEASURE