Sex, Technology and Public Health by Mark Davis

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Sex, Technology and Public Health is an important book which addresses, in some detail, the problematic relationship between modern sexuality and the global medium of the internet. As someone currently conducting research on an HIV-related topic, I found this book particularly illuminating, as it drew me towards new conceptions of HIV, constructing around this disease an elaborate discussion on the topic of technosexuality. The question of how (or if) the internet as a space for social networking is to be policed is not a new one, but Mark Davis's book breathes fresh life into this debate by extending its implications and focus. His overall examination of sexual practice, the internet and his recognition of public health politics, is sophisticated and is carefully developed throughout the book. While this book is clearly an advanced study of sexual health and internet media, it makes no assumptions of its readers. For example, Davis's usage of the term 'technosexual' is thoughtful and clearly defined. Given that this term has only entered cultural usage very recently, Davis takes great care to explain his own use of the term in the book. Indeed, he dedicates a significant part of the introduction the figure of the technosexual. Davis informs the reader that, 'the technosexual [signifies] the potent mingling of emerging technological capacities and sexual and romantic desire'. Within this introduction he raises one of the book's key questions, concerning whether the 'technosexual' embodies the health risk inherent within internet networking, asking where, and under what circumstances,

social intervention is required into the 'practices' of the technosexual.

Davis broaches such questions within a series of chapters which examine all aspects of technosexual behaviour, including: 'Technologies and Sexual Citizenship;' 'Internet-Mediated Sexual Practices;' 'HIV Bio-Technologies and Sexual Practice;' and 'Technological Visibilities'. These chapters approach the subject of technosexuality from a range of different perspectives, incorporating the clinical, political and cultural elements of the debate. With regard to the latter, it immediately becomes apparent how contentious the use of the internet as a device for social networking or 'e-dating' is within modern culture. Most of Davis's readers will be familiar with the sensationalist interpretations of such practices within the popular press, which, have tended to characterise them as dangerous or perverse. In part, Davis recognises these charges about internet relationships, but his study sharpens the issues at play within public perceptions of 'e-dating,' for example. Fundamental to his investigation of this phenomenon is his interest inIV infection and the transmissible potential of sexual infection with 'e-dating'. Davis reminds us that,

> E-dating and related internet-mediated forms of sexual interaction appear to have become popular activities in the internet age. Accordingly, research has considered whether or not e-dating increases the transmission of sexually transmitted and HIV. But the findings of this research are somewhat ambiguous.

He continues, 'Understanding e-dating as a self-consciously produced practice goes some way in critiquing common misunderstandings of the relationship between the internet and sexuality'. Part of Davis's thesis within the book suggests that internet dating is an example of socially 'produced' forms of networking online which serve to meet the requirements of individuals with a

busy working life, who use the internet as a means of communicating with others outside work. His book demonstrates that there is no clear link between the spread of HIV infection and internet networking sites, but nevertheless acknowledges that research within this field remains incomplete and 'ambiguous'.

Further, Davis's approach to his subject matter is absorbing and inventive. Within his chapter on 'Technological Visibilities', for example, he argues that, 'the internet is making all manner of aspects of sexual practices visible'. Davis bases this on the fact that 'online profiles, chatroom discussions and other expressions of technosexuality are attractive to public health governance because they suggest that it is possible to observe the intimate and sexual life of citizens in ways that are not otherwise possible'. Chapters such as this one strike a good balance between reinventing the social possibilities of networking sites, alongside the recognition of the fact that such sites should be monitored, within part of a wider 'ethics of sexual conduct'. In approaching the topic in this way, his book recognises that social networking sites provide both a unique space through which an exchange of thoughts on sexuality can take place, whilst equally acting as a space which invites public health 'governance'. As evidence of this, the book uses the examples of the 'safe-sex passport' and the use of the internet to market sex through products of sexual enhancement such as Viagra, in order to express the interplay between the different ways of looking at the internet and sex.

In conclusion, *Sex, Technology and Public Health,* is an inter-disciplinary text, which will appeal to anyone working within health care, media studies, sociology or politics. One of the book's best qualities is its readability on a number of levels, feeding both the research interests of experts in this field, while remaining accessible

to new readers interested in examining these very current social topics. At several points in the book, Davis acknowledges the incomplete status of the research on this topic, accepting that a book such as this should be seen as being at the beginning of a wider series of research studies into the issues it addresses. HIV is raised as the central sexual threat at work within internet relationships. Davis could perhaps have examined in greater detailthe transmissible potential of the internet with other, albeit less alarming sexual infections, such as Chlamydia or HPV (Human Papilloma Virus). Nevertheless, this is an intelligent study, which penetrates beyond media and governmental 'rhetoric' on internet sexualities, setting out to interrogate the more complex social dimension of sexual communication online. This is essential reading for anyone interested in such forms of communication.

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