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## Book Reviews

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Jane Arthurs (2004) *Television and Sexuality: Regulation and the Politics of Taste*, New York: Open University Press. ISBN 0-33-5209-750.

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The Open University Press series *Issues in Cultural and Media Studies* has so far produced some very detailed and useful overview books. I am happy to report that Jane Arthurs' *Television and Sexuality* upholds the general high quality of this series: this is an important, well-written book.

Arthurs' subject is the representation of sexuality on television in contemporary society. Studies of representation can often become quite narrow in their focus on the textual, but the main strength of *Television and Sexuality* is that issues of representations are contextualised historically and theoretically throughout. A recurring theme is the importance of the transformations in the television industry: de-regulation and commercialisation. Arthurs identifies sexuality and representations of sexuality as a key marketing tool in a media world of branding and consumer culture. The dialectic of the sexual citizen vs. the sexual consumer is present throughout the book, and works very well as both an organising and analytical principle.

The two first chapters are theoretical and introduce the key concepts used in the book. It is also here that the synthesising approach of the book works best, bringing different and sometimes disparate strands of research together. Arthurs' integrates feminist cultural theory, public sphere theory and more recent queer theory for a compelling analytical framework that avoids many of the normative traps inherent in studying a subject like sexuality. Overall, the theoretical perspective comes across as measured, reflexive and balanced.

The following chapters consist of empirical case studies based on the theoretical framework introduced in the opening chapters, dealing with several different

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aspects of televised representation: pornography (Chapter Three), sex scandals (Chapter Four), sexuality in science and nature programming (Chapter Five), documentaries on the sex industry (Chapter Six), and sexuality on prime time drama in the UK and USA (Chapters Seven and Eight).

In contrast to the thoroughness of the first two chapters, the more empirical chapters are a bit uneven. The drawbacks of the synthesising approach come to light in the chapter on sex scandals, where Arthurs does a good job of summarizing previous and current research on the subject but does not add much in the way of new knowledge. The empirical element is also sometimes a bit thin, particularly in the chapter on sexuality in science and nature programming. The analysis of the Discovery channels rests on a series of examples that seems to be chosen more strategically than systematically, for example. Arthurs also draws quite bold general conclusions based on an analysis of mainly two programme series.

These are minor quibbles, however. The chapter on pornography is excellent, carefully deconstructing the normative and epistemological underpinnings of the different sides in the debate on pornography, as well as putting pornography into a socio-cultural context using Bourdieu's theory of distinction and taste. The two chapters on sexuality in TV drama in the US and the UK makes for some very interesting comparisons and, again, anchors the textual analysis to a discussion of changes in the television industry and the growth of individualised consumer culture. All in all, this book is a very solid overview of the subject area as well as a theoretically sharp analysis of key concepts and issues.