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The White Supremacy Aesthetic: A Racial Capitalist Intervention on Instagram

Jordyn Sheldon
Queen's University - Kingston, Ontario, jordyyns@gmail.com

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The White Supremacy Aesthetic: A Racial Capitalist Intervention on Instagram

Presented by:

Jordyn Sheldon, Queen’s University - Kingston, Ontario

Session: New Media and Imagery

Abstract:

Social media is a ubiquitous aspect of the modern world. The globalization of communication has transformed the ways in which we interact as human beings. However, it is crucial to acknowledge that this technology is not neutral ground. Social media are platforms upon which relationships of power are negotiated. They also exist within structures of power. Where Twitter engages users in writing short texts and Facebook allows users to post or share almost anything, Instagram, owned by Facebook, is the social media platform which focuses primarily on images, photographs and other visuals. This format has powerful implications when one considers the impact of curating or performing aesthetics within societies constructed and controlled by racialization. Situated within contemporary analysis of the critical theory of social media, Jordyn Sheldon responds to an omission of intersectional and critical race analysis. She interrogates social media, specifically Instagram, through a racial capitalist lens in order to expose how this platform utilizes democratic racism to authorize white supremacy.

To consider how Instagram reinforces white supremacy, her analysis is multi-dimensional. She begins by analyzing the algorithms and data collection processes of Instagram using a racial capitalist framework. Then, conducts a qualitative thematic analysis of user data to expose how Instagram, in cooperation with it’s users, employ democratic racism through its reporting system. Tracing through commonly used hashtags on anti-racist accounts online, Sheldon flags which posts are most frequently reported and by whom they are posted. She uses this data to identify patterns of white supremacy and surveillance.

Ultimately, she exposes the racial and political implications of corporate owned social media, reveals mechanisms of resistance and strives to generate a commitment to the potential for anti-racist social media platforms.

Presenter information:

Jordyn Sheldon holds a Bachelor of Arts in Human Rights and Rhetoric and Communications at the University of Winnipeg. There, she built her methodological foundations in critical theory, qualitative research and critical studies of discourse. Building on the works of Glen Coulthard, Arthur Manuel and Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Jordyn investigates settler colonialism and researches methods for systemic and ideological decolonization in Canada. She cites the
experiences she has had as a settler Canadian as the root of her passion for unlearning and unsettling her behaviours, mind and work in academia and beyond. Inspired more broadly by many other critical race scholars like Cheryl Harris, and Richard Delgado, she has also examined the ways in which white supremacy is embedded in Canadian society. As the the Education Coordinator at the Manitoba Association for Rights and Liberties (MARL), Jordyn is able to develop and teach anti-racist and anti-colonial approaches to education. She has also pursued this work doing educational programming at the Canadian Museum for Human Rights and the National Centre for Truth and Reconciliation. In the fall of 2019, she will begin a Master’s in Cultural Studies at Queen’s University.