



Book Review

Social Media Freaks: Digital Identity in the Network Society

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Kidd, D. (2017). *Social media freaks: Digital identity in the network society*. Boulder, CO: Westview Press. ISBN-13:978-0-367-09829-2

Social media has made its way into our everyday interactions via Facebook, Snapchat, email, Google, Twitter, Instagram. Internet users can create personal social media identities as well as virtual spaces which can be categorized as cultural objects. Users come together to create shared meaning and groups. Therefore, social media platforms provide a virtual culture to explore. Dustin Kidd, a professor in the sociology department at Temple University, focuses on the relationship between the Internet, social media, and marginalized groups. *Social Media Freaks* (2017) is his latest publication; a follow up to *Pop Culture Freaks: Identity, Mass Media, and Society* (2014). The book is a "field guide for scholars who are studying social media with a focus on identity, inequality and social movements" (p. ix). *Social Media Freaks* draws from virtual ethnography methodology using a series of cases to examine the ways that various groups in society experience oppression and harassment in social media and the ways they use social media to push back against oppression" (p. 4).

Chapter one is an overview of social media language, establishes the theoretical framework, recognizes social media as an art form, defines the methodology, and discusses technological connections to culture and society using a sociological lens. Chapter two explains the social structure of social media. This chapter consists of a summary of the history of social media. In it, major and minor social media platforms, such as Google, Facebook, and Twitter, among others are defined, "outlining the parameters of power and control" (p.68). Tables describe the leadership diversity profile of several companies. The overall leadership composition is male, white, straight, cisgender, and nondisabled. Chapters three through seven are case studies covering sexuality, disability, gender, class, and racial perspectives. Chapter eight offers a step-by-step approach to use social media as a tool for "social change and civic engagement" (p. 194). Chapter nine is a reflection about social media engagement using Audre Lorde's famous quotes "The master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde 194, p. 112 via Kidd, p. 223). The book contains

special features. Each chapter contains sections labeled as "methodological moment" containing field notes. Throughout the book, internet web addresses appear in the footnotes. The appendix consists of a transcript from his Digital Media Literacy video animation (<http://www.dustinkidd.net/digital-media-literacy>) and social media glossary.

The author uses Georg Simmel's "The Stranger" (1908) social unit traveling merchant defining the term *freaks*. Kidd draws from Manuel Castells to acquaint the reader with "how identity functions in the network society" (p.9) and "the power of social media for social movements" (p. 19). As such, the author invokes a sociological analysis between class, social media, and the Occupy Wall Street movement. This discussion, in turn, is followed by the Black Lives Matter/ All Lives Matter movement and the influence of social media in its activism. Drawing from an array of sociology scholars Kidd questions: *Does social media reproduce inequalities or is it a tool for subverting them?*

The author argues that social media is a tool to push back against oppression as a platform that provides a voice, especially to marginalized peoples. The second main argument is social media as an art is connected to human action. In some instances, as in the case study of GamerGate: gender oppression, project identity, and art come together as a tool for social transformation.

This book is a significant contribution for scholars who seek other social justice perspectives in addition to understanding how to use social media as a tool for social justice (See book, Chapter 8). Kidd reflects on the positive and negative side of technology, networks, and social media platform corporate ownership. The book ends on a final reflection with Audre Lorde's claim, "the master's tools will never dismantle the master's house" (Lorde, 1984). Kidd states, "Social media is a powerful new resource and a tremendous new well of artistic possibility, but a corporate-controlled social media industry run by a cabal of the most privileged people in the world will never dismantle the matrix of domination" (p. 229).



Annette Hestres Garcia, Ph.D., graduated from Penn State University in 2017 with a Dual-Title in Adult Education and Comparative and International Education. She is Puerto Rican, the first female in her family to earn a doctorate. Her preferred research approach is qualitative, with interest in experiential learning, cultural-historical, and memoir stories. Currently, she works as a freelance researcher seeking volunteer work.