

In the last episode we honed in on the black lives matter movement creating the momentum we see in social media activism today. It played a key role in shaking up people's instagram feeds and starting much needed conversations of social justice. I'm Ashton Clopton, and, in this episode, we'll uncover how social media is not free of the inequalities minorities face across so many systems in the country. The role of an influencer is prone to issues of white privilege and access, and influencers of color are constantly fighting an algorithm that does not support them.

In the previous episode, Fashion Influencer and Blogger Amanda Nava touched on this idea of a bubble. The bubble represents who we follow, what we subscribe to, and the things we're willing to accept into our realm of existence on social media. As a marketing major, Nava breaks down the instagram algorithm quite simply.

Nava: "So, if everyone that you're following is white and a fashion blogger its gonna recommend more white fashion blogger and brands that you shop you know its a marketing tool."

So we know that social media platforms have an agenda, and that is to create revenue and coax you into spending as much time on the app as possible. It makes safe assumptions of content it believes you will like or honestly are comfortable seeing.

Conversations about race and white privilege can be uncomfortable. So on multiple fronts, apps like instagram aren't going to not only push content that includes these ideas, but individuals who might convey these ideas by existing.

What I mean by this is, like Nava said, if you're used to seeing white people, you will continue seeing white people because it is comfortable to you and doesn't distract you from the ways in which the app is trying to sell things to you.

Algorithm aside, Nava makes an even better point in her interview that as a middle class woman myself, I had not considered.

Nava: "Inequality comes from systemic issues, blogging is definitely a space that focuses on showcasing that because a lot of it does revolve around you know accessibility and materialism. Especially in the fashion space, you know, you have to have these items to talk about them, and share them, and have great closets and all of that, so all of that comes with money being able to be spent and having access to those goods. So, I think that for people that don't have that, they don't reach the same amount of people who do. And, a lot of those people who do reach that level having a large following are white women."

With black and hispanic people having ratios that double the number white people in the lower class individually and quadruple when paired together, it is no surprise why a career based in accessibility and disposable income isn't as welcoming to minorities as it is to white people.

Nava: "Aside from the economic side of it, there's I guess people's racial bias that comes into play as well."

This not only is indicative of the algorithm issues we were discussing earlier, but also, what people might be seeking out when going onto these platforms that based on imagery and appearances.

Sarita, the white-hispanic lifestyle influencer, alludes to the fact that standards of beauty might have something to do with it.

"I feel like people want to follow society's standards of beauty. In terms of societal standards POC's don't fit that, including myself in a sense, you know I have really curly hair, I'm not like this western idealistic you know picture of beauty if you will."

African-American college influencer Chazlynn Stensin started to touch on this in our previous episode.

Stensin: "I feel like black women aren't really represented well in certain aesthetics, right. Like right now you see on instagram cottage-core aesthetics and like girly pink. That type of thing is just not seen and so hard to come by."

White beauty and style influencer JayLee Pelkington also touched on beauty standards in our last episode, but went more into depth in her interview on what she refers to as a gap in recognition of POC influencers.

"Other than what I was saying you know of the white skinny blonde girl or beautiful bombshell brunette, you know that kind of look, I think that just in general I don't think a lot of people necessarily, to this day, think of blogging and think of their favorite POC blogger. You know what I'm saying? I don't think that it's as big, I don't think they've become as big as they should in the industry, and I think there is still a huge gap there."

The gap is in some ways a fault of the algorithm and the public, but African American creator Stensin, brings up a good point, the gap can also be perpetuated by brands themselves.

Stensin recalls moments where she caught on to instances of inequality in pay.

“If you notice, like you work with a brand and say that was a gifted collaboration. And you thought it was a gifted collaboration because the brand never mentioned anything about payment. And then like you see, someone else, paid partnership or they have like hashtag ad and you're like woah that was never mentioned to me. Sometimes you have to think about, oh, was it because of my followers or is it because of my race. There's just so many things that go through your head.”

In 2019, Forbes reported that black women made on average 21% less than white women. Journalist Maryann Reid interviewed Therapist and racial trauma specialist, Ashley McGirt, on why this statistic is often overlooked.

McGirt says quote “As white women continue to climb up the economic pay scale and make a wage closer to that of our white male counterparts it dilutes what the black woman is experiencing and silences their experiences. Coupling these two groups together also fails to recognize the systems of oppression that disproportionately impacts black women.” end quote.

McGirt debunks a popular, but inaccurate argument against the claims that black women are being oppressed in this way.

McGirt says quote “There is this mistaken belief that if black women worked harder they would receive the pay they deserved. In reality, black women are working harder with less resources than white women.” end quote.

The remark about less resources circles us back to the beginning of our discussion with unequal opportunity due to unequal access to good and disposable income.

Apart from the issues we have discussed today, there is hope for the influencing community and social media as a whole. With the pandemic labeling a lot of content based on materialism as out of touch, a trend of reality is on the rise, and micro influencers, according to Nava, are at the forefront of that wave.

Nava: “In today's world where everything is digital and everything is a lot more accessible and people are more willing to share their perspective, I think that's why the micro influencing community has blown up and you see that diversity.”

I'm Ashton Clopton and thank you for listening to another episode of Influencing Race. Have a great one.