

Finding the perfect solution to anything can be nearly impossible, but that doesn't mean we don't try. In this episode, we'll discuss different solutions to the problems we covered in the previous episodes. When it comes to things like unequal pay from white women to black women, that solution is a lot more simple. Stop underpaying black women and start valuing them for their creativity, beauty, and perspective. I am more interested in talking about the grey areas right now and the things that may not appear at first glance.

I'm Ashton Clopton and in today's episode we'll be discussing how to solve issues of white privilege on social media and foster a greater community within that through the help of influencers and audience participation.

As we know, the Black Lives Matter movement sparked plenty of conversation on social media regarding social justice, systemic racism, and white privilege.

Black fashion influencer Ashley Brown believes it is all about finding a jumping off point.

Ashley: "Using your voice, even if it's sitting down at your family dinner and talking to your parents about race, getting the conversation started is the most important thing."

Fellow influencer and white-hispanic content creator Sarita talks about her role in engaging in those conversations as an ally.

Sarita: "I feel like I've done a decent job like sharing things on my story, but I think personally think I need to do a better job and like I'll be the first to call myself out on that because I feel like when you have a platform, you are responsible in a sense to be a role model to people."

But Brown has noticed instances where other influencers stay silent, exercising that same white privilege.

Brown: "If something is happening or if someone says something racially insensitive and they are white then they may be able to kind of get away with it cause it's not in the realm of influencing, and all that. It may not be seen as a big deal speaking out. You know, some creators may feel the need not to speak out because they feel like they don't have to."

Regardless of whether or not an influencer chooses to speak on a racialized issue like the BLM movement, there is still the constant reality that influencing is still a very white dominated space.

White Fashion influencer and blogger Amanda Nava can recall her observations of POC on the platform since she has been a part of the space since the late 2010s.

“I definitely can see the lack of them (POC) on the platform back when I started on the platform in 2016...”

Both Nava and fellow white beauty and fashion influencer JaLee Pelkington agree that the first step to creating a more diverse and inclusive space is to get creators of color on these platform and in the role of an influencer.

Pelkington lays out her top three solutions to this.

Pelkington: “One, we need to encourage those around us who want to do this type of thing. And, um, make them feel as though they are worthy to do it, they are going to be successful at it. I think that’s one portion. And then, the second portion would be you know, they have the confidence to post and just be them. And you know, the right people are going to love your content and I hope that our world you know can become more accepting and the micro influencing world can become more inclusive because there are more creators that take that step, and say, you know what, I’m gonna do this. And the third part would be the brands being more inclusive as a whole when it comes to collaborations and making sure that they are including people from all different backgrounds, and all different skin types, and all different body types to their campaigns and being really intentional about that. I think there’s a lot of facets to it, but that's what I would say my main ones would be.”

On Pelkington’s third point, brands. Putting your money where your mouth is, is so important. That’s how we start to see real change and avoid empty activism.

African-American college and lifestyle influencer Chazlynn Stensin agrees and says that with the help of major brands, black creators and other POC creators can be uplifted in this space.

Stensin: “I just think more brands, more companies just need to not only seek black creators but repost them, utilize them, reach out to them because it's so difficult when you want to reach out to a brand and you go on their page and everything aligns, they're totally your style, all of the values align and then you go and there's no people of color on their page and you're like, dang do I even want to waste my time emailing them or pitching myself to them. It’s things like that that make you second guess.”

Aside from brands, Sarita has some recommendations for your personal accounts on the individual level.

Sarita: “I think that everyone including myself should do their homework and try to diversify their feed as much as possible...there is also something to learn and something to gain”

Diversifying your feed is a solution multiple interviewees brought up. While Sarita put the responsibility on the individual, Nava had ideas about how the platforms themselves can help out with this.

Nava: “I think that it's that duality that we were talking about you know instagram wants to show you content that it thinks you like and that is going to perform well based off your actions in the past. I'm not a tech wizard, so I don't understand like the full way that that happens, but I think that it's based on a lot of your interactions and sort of what you share, and different hashtags and things like that. So, I'd like to see more outputs from platforms that kind of are in the realm of ‘we think you might like this,’ rather than sort of like ‘oh I saw that you liked this post with a white t-shirt in it, here's ten more white t-shirts that you might like.’ And kind of focusing more on the attributes of the content and saying ‘ok, here's a you know fashion blogger that you follow, you know here's five other fashion bloggers from all different backgrounds, all different locations,’ and really honing in on those attributes and trying to diversify the different types of content that people are seeing would be really cool.”

So from brands, to consumers, to the algorithm, a conscious push for diversity is the best solution for the issues regarding representation of POC in influencing and combatting a lot of the white privilege that pervades the social media space. While movements like the BLM movement got the ball rolling for many people, a consistent effort to uplift POC creators and support racialized issues is necessary.

I'm Ashton Clopton, and I want to thank you for listening to this miniseries “Influencing Race.” I hope it sparked conversations about topics of race or gave new perspectives on the realm of social media and micro influencing. I want to thank all my interview subjects for taking the time to have these conversations and share their insight with all of us. Have a great one everybody and go make social media a better place to be.