

“We should have different voices with different perspectives”

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This article is by Polis Summer School student Bonny Astor on the guest talk given by Samantha Asumadu (@honestlyAbroad) founder of Media Diversified (@WritersofColour)

Samantha Asumadu – founder of Media Diversified – is admittedly combative on social media; but she’s also extremely effective.

[Samantha Asumadu @ Polis Summer School 2015](#) from [Polis Video](#) on [Vimeo](#).

“The higher you get up the chain of media and communication, the white-er and male-er you get”

Asumadu’s mission to achieve racial equality in British journalism was sparked by an article in the Voice newspaper. The 2013 article, titled “The ‘Evening Standard’ of Whiteness”, described the baffling discrepancy between the ES’s target audience of inner city Londoners versus the individuals pictured within its pages. 40% of London residents are members of ‘ethnic minorities’, but it is common for entire editions of the ES to include fewer than ten pictures of “people of colour” – a high proportion of whom are celebrities based outside the UK.

Outraged by such glaring inequality and having recently embraced social media, Asumadu took action. First she wrote a ‘storify’ – a narrated collation of tweets – about the issue, then she started a blog, then she created a twitter account, and finally she launched the hashtag: #AllWhiteFrontPages. Asumadu’s prolific online activity eventually caught the attention of the Guardian, which commissioned her to write [an article](#) on the issue.

Diversity

Although part of her organization’s name, Asumadu finds the word “diversity” troubling: “it means different things for different people – for me, diversity does not equal liberation”. She explained that even in superficially diverse settings, non-white journalists often experience unfair treatment due to race-based discrimination. For example: the Guardian has a tendency to selectively commission pieces about prejudice and discrimination from non-white journalists, whereas white journalists are commissioned to write articles about the topics they are interested in. Media Diversified aims to combat such insidious racism by publicly challenging biased editorial practices and providing non-white writers with opportunities to write what they want to write.

“We did something practical”

Having just celebrated its two year anniversary, Media Diversified is proud to boast that its website now experiences a daily traffic of thousands of hits, contributing to a total of over one million views. But the site, which provides an “independent platform for journalists, artists, and academics of colour to publish content” is just one component of an initiative that has evolved into something much bigger: “we’re not just publishing writers, we’re doing advocacy!”

The following three examples of Media Diversified projects are just the tip of the iceberg.

1) Yasin Bangee’s [October 2013 article](#) juxtaposed media coverage of a) “North Yorkshire Child Abuse” and b) “Oxford Grooming” – both stories of child abuse, but with an enormous difference in the amount of coverage they received.

Comparison and language

If you look at the BBC stories for both the North Yorkshire and the Oxford grooming cases you'll notice some obvious differences.



2) The Media Diversified [Experts' Directory](#) is a response to the excuses of editors' who don't take diversity seriously or claim that the lack of diversity in British media is due to a lack of accessible non-white experts and sources. The Expert's Directory voids this excuse because it provides, free of charge, a "searchable and managed database of experts and professionals in a variety of fields, all of whom have experience in media settings," and none of whom are white.



3) [The Trashies](#) – a play on Hollywood's "The Razzies" – is an online poll devoted to "challenging the media's misinformed consensus" by identifying articles that perpetuate racism. It encourages audience

participation by soliciting nominations of 'trash journalism'

Media Diversified grew out of the injustice that Asumadu felt when she realized that there was something crucial missing from mainstream media. Though deeply invested in her cause, Asumadu noted that there are plenty of other problems that need solving. She concluded her talk by encouraging aspiring journalists to get involved: "see a hole [in the media], get irritated, and out of passion or stupidity you can build something."

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