

# **Cultural Diversity on Television**

## **Phase IA - Background Research**

### ***Review of Academic Literature***

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## I. Introduction

Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc. (SRG) is pleased to present to **The Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television** the background research review of Phase I of a comprehensive five-phase research program designed to examine the presence and portrayal of ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples on Canadian private television.

This Phase I report summarizes the key issues and themes regarding representation of ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples in the media (including both electronic and print) identified in recent literature. Included in this review are academic sources, and news articles, as well as industry and non-governmental organization reports. It serves to provide context and background for the current state of issues surrounding the presence and portrayal of minorities and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada and, as such, is an excellent stepping off point for Phases II through V of this research program.

Phase I consists of 4 parts: A – Review of Academic Literature; B– Overview of Other Jurisdictions; C – Summary of Previous Content Analyses; and D – Bibliography.

This document is a summary of Phase I background research. For reference, the complete list of research phases is as follows:

- Phase I Background Research (consisting of IA, IB, IC & ID)
- Phase II Research – Best Practices Review
- Phase III Research – Stakeholder One-on-One Interviews
- Phase IV Research – Focus Groups
- Phase V Research – Benchmark Content Analysis

The findings of each phase of the research program are presented as stand alone reports, available under separate cover.

## II. Overview

A review of recent academic literature points to general agreement among academic and NGO media researchers that gradual, modest improvements have been made in the quantity and quality of representation of visible minorities and Aboriginal Peoples in the Canadian media over the past decade. At the same time, however, many of these same researchers continue to criticize the *mainstream* media for the persistent lack of fair and accurate representation in both news and non-news programming. Under-representation, invisibilization and misrepresentation, they state, occur on many levels from omission, shallow inclusion and stereotypical characterization within entertainment genres to biased reporting and negative problem-oriented portrayal in news and information programming. In other words, while improvements have been made, there's a long way to go yet.

The outcome of such negative and inaccurate portrayal is that minorities are often perceived as “invisible,” “problem people,” “stereotypes,” “white-washed” and “adornments.”<sup>1</sup> These portrayals function to marginalize minority Canadians, resulting in the perpetuation of “feelings of exclusion - especially when we place value upon those representations as fair and equitable mirrors of our nation.”<sup>2</sup>

The focus of much of the academic literature to date has been on the nature and quality of the portrayal of minorities, the effects of media representation on the formation of social identities, and the influence of the media on the development of social and economic policies in Canada. Research conducted over the past decade has also focused on understanding deeper systemic issues – the context and reasons for the continual production of these persistent negative representations.

Many media analysts and NGOs have called for continual research to be conducted towards accessing a benchmark from which to monitor progress and to encourage public debate on the politics of minority representation. A formal, comprehensive content analysis of the subject in Canada has not been conducted since MediaWatch's 1994 *Front & Centre* study (The only other content analysis addressing these issues was *Silent on the Set* (2002), a pilot study conducted directed by C. Murray at Simon Fraser University.). A two-phase study examining television programming was conducted in 2003 by media researchers Frances Henry and Carol Tator.<sup>3</sup> The study analyzed racist discourse in news programming and examined the representation and portrayal of people of ethnocultural and racial backgrounds in television programs (national and local network news and programming) and advertising.

## III. Canadian Context

Canada was the first and remains the only country in the world to adopt an official Multiculturalism Policy (within a bilingual framework) in 1971. A broad

framework of policies and laws supports Canada's approach to diversity. The Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms (1982), the Canadian Human Rights Act (1977), the Employment Equity Act (1986), the Multiculturalism Act (1988) and the Broadcasting Act (1991), to name a few, all serve to identify and define Canadian policy with respect to our ethnoculturally diverse population. These and other constitutional measures and legislation illustrate the extent to which Canada has embraced diversity or cultural pluralism in both policy and practice. Multiculturalism is viewed as one of Canada's most important and unique attributes, both socially and economically.

The degree of diversity within our population became front-page news across the country following the release of the 2001 census, which showed that visible minorities accounted for 13.4% of the total population. Further, it reported that the growth of the visible minority population was significantly outpacing that of the total population. The proportion of Canadians who were foreign-born was found to be the highest it had been in 70 years, while current immigration patterns suggested that by 2016 one in five Canadians would belong to a visible minority group.

Within this context, the Canadian Radio-television and Telecommunications Commission's (CRTC) mandate is to ensure that all broadcasters contribute to a system that accurately reflects the presence of cultural, ethnic and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada.

To this end, the CRTC has identified two objectives for Canadian broadcasters:

1. The broadcasting system should be a mirror in which all Canadians can see themselves and see themselves portrayed fairly, accurately and without stereotypes.
2. The broadcasting system should be one which allows producers, writers, technicians and artists from different cultural and social perspectives the opportunity to participate.

Since August 2001, the CRTC has required that broadcasters submit corporate plans for cultural diversity that include initiatives designed to achieve these goals. Such initiatives include commitments to corporate accountability, the reflection of diversity in programming, and the solicitation of effective feedback from viewers. There is a further expectation that broadcasters submit annual reports outlining progress for every year of their licence terms.

Also in 2001, the CRTC issued Public Notice 2001-88, which called upon the Canadian Association of Broadcasters (CAB) to establish a task force - *The Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television*. This Task Force has in turn provided the impetus for this multi-phased research project, an initiative designed to help establish a benchmark and a possible framework for an ongoing plan of action.

#### **IV. Common Themes and Issues of Representation**

##### **A. The Meaning of Diversity: Assimilation vs. Authenticity**

Fundamental to the issue of minority representation in Canada is the debate regarding the meaning of “diversity,” a concept that further complicates discussions of its accurate depiction. Within the discussions of the depiction of diversity are two differing perspectives on this objective. Some believe that equality is achieved when differences become irrelevant, thereby achieving a state of “colour-blindness,” while others believe it is achieved when qualities are accounted for as different yet equal. In practice, this issue becomes particularly relevant because it affects the evaluation of the successful representation and portrayal of diversity. For the first group, an assimilationist model is the goal; for the second, it is important to illuminate ethnic and cultural differences in an effort to further the acceptance and understanding of diversity.

Various points of view have been expressed about the best ways to depict ethnocultural differences positively and authentically without stereotyping. One approach has been to represent positive stereotypes of cultural diversity through depictions of cultural festivals or foods. But this portrayal of a “rich cultural heritage” has often been reproached as clichéd and superficial without any real concern for addressing ethnic minority issues. Y. Jiwani argues that in such cases the status quo of the dominant culture and structure is maintained,<sup>4</sup> while “a façade of safe engagement with immigrant groups screens their marginalization.”<sup>5</sup> The *Silent on the Set* (2002) study found that the depictions of the culinary aspects of a culture were often correlated to negative or stereotypical portrayals of treatment.

*Silent on the Set* also addressed the issue of the inclusion of auditory indicators as a component of the representation of ethnocultural diversity. The study found that of all the minority characters in *Silent on the Set*, nine in ten spoke English without an accent.

In that study, minorities were also more likely to be found within work settings than in family or social environments that would place them within a cultural context. In addition, the theme of struggling with one’s own cultural identity and with topics relating to the cultural circumstance of immigration rarely occurred in a dramatic story line. A. Fleras argues that the consequence of this kind of shallow representation and “normalization” can result in “de-sensitizing the audience by making it more callous and indifferent to minority experiences.”<sup>6</sup>

The issue of what constitutes “positive” portrayal is in itself a source of debate. The *Cosby Show* in the US raised one of the most polemical cases regarding the stances for and against “positive” portrayal in the 1980s. Those who supported the show praised the “positive” role model of the black middle-class family in contrast to the pervasive negative portrayal of Black Americans in the media. Critics, on the other hand, saw a superficial, “cleansed,” “white-washed” representation of Blacks and accused the *Cosby* characters of being “Afro-Saxons” or “Oreos.” These people felt that the show had the potential of undermining anti-racist goals by “proving” that Blacks could make it in a white society, and that “those who failed had only themselves to blame.”<sup>7</sup>

Conversely, the avoidance of negative portrayals has also been questioned. Some broadcasters and creators argue that negative portrayals can be acceptable, if they are “relevant to the context, or integral to the theme, and/or with educational or social value.”<sup>8</sup> However, there is evidence to the contrary. A study in the UK notes that negative portrayals in the form of challenging satiric content are often missed by racist viewers and can further entrench racial preconceptions.<sup>9</sup>

In her article “Televising the Nation: Cultural Diversity and Representation in Quebec,” J. Warren assesses the portrayal of the award-winning production *Tag*, which aired on Radio-Canada (2000).<sup>10</sup> Considered innovative in its portrayal of young street gangs of ethnic backgrounds in Montreal, the show was commended for its ability to go beyond stereotypes and for its attempt to tell the stories of marginalized youth in a credible and complex manner. However, Warren questions the degree to which the series accomplishes a positive end, even if it does go beyond stereotypical characterization, since the stereotype is perpetuated by its very occurrence in the story.

The debates over what is “positive” portrayal and whether “negative” portrayal is ever justified serve just as a sampling of the complex issues inherent within the question of representation and portrayal of ethnocultural diversity. A. Fleras acknowledges the difficult role the media play in addressing the issue. He notes that “TV programming occupies an awkward position in constructively engaging diversity...they are damned if they do, damned if they don’t.”<sup>11</sup>

The lack of consensus on what constitutes fair and balanced portrayal renders the task of reflecting diversity more challenging to execute and affects the progress of change as, he states, some may find it easier to act cautiously or ignore the issue altogether.<sup>12</sup> The issue is further complicated by the varied viewpoints within cultural and racial communities. Minority groups are divided,

with proponents on both sides of the argument for integration and assimilation, or for cultural separateness and authenticity.

Although admittedly difficult to accomplish, academics state that solutions must take into account sub-group differences. More research into understanding the intersections of various identity markers including gender, socio-economic status, age/generation, sexual orientation and regional differences, among others, will be key in effecting change in the portrayal of ethnocultural and racial minorities in Canadian media. Studies such as *The Portrayal of Muslim Women in Canadian Mainstream Media: A Community-Based Analysis* (1998) for the Afghan Women's Organization by G. J. Jafri, which takes an in-depth look at how Muslim women want to see themselves portrayed in Canadian mainstream media, are leading the way in informing and encouraging public debate.<sup>13</sup>

The assimilationist model for onscreen reflection (achieving “colour-blindness” in casting) in other jurisdictions is discussed in detail by H. May in his study *Broadcast in Colour: Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries* (2002). He notes that the UK, Australia, New Zealand and the US have tended towards portrayals of cultural diversity as an “everyday multiculturalism.”<sup>14</sup> In these jurisdictions, stories or characters are no longer presented with a focus on cultural background or culturally defined issues and actors are no longer cast in roles related to their cultural background, though these depictions are not necessarily lacking in depth of cultural portrayal.

This “everyday multiculturalism” approach focuses on the growing economic potential of younger second and third generation ethnocultural and racial minorities. It recognizes that these new generations are more cosmopolitan and do not necessarily define themselves by race alone. Greg Dyke, Director-General of the BBC notes, “I want a BBC where diversity is seen as an asset not an issue or a problem. For young people today British culture is already diverse and heterogeneous, multi-ethnic, multi-everything. For them, multiculturalism is not about political correctness but is simply part of the furniture of their everyday lives.”<sup>15</sup>

## **B. Invisibilization, Misrepresentation and Stereotyping**

As stated earlier, many researchers have noted that there has been recent improvement in the levels of representation of ethnocultural and racial minority groups in Canadian media.<sup>16</sup> However, many argue that various degrees of invisibilization and misrepresentation still exist. Their findings suggest that images of minorities are still based on generalizations and prejudices, and are often one-dimensional. Below is a summary of a few key issues that appear frequently in the literature.

**i. *Aboriginal Peoples: Historical and Contemporary Misrepresentation***

The academic literature indicates that Aboriginal Peoples have been persistently invisibilized by the media and continue to be one of the most misrepresented and stereotyped groups in Canada. Aboriginal representation, by virtue of its absence in mainstream media, has been characterized as “first-order invisibilization.”<sup>17</sup> Many critics note that the reality of contemporary Aboriginal Peoples and their culture has historically been absent from North American media. In its place are clichéd and stereotypical portrayals, such as the “savage Indian,” “blood-thirsty barbarian,” and the “noble warrior.”<sup>18</sup> Aboriginal women have been particularly subject to mis-representation and omission on screen. Images of the Aboriginal woman as the exotic, beautiful “Indian Princess” or “sexual savage” are recurring stereotypes.<sup>19</sup>

Even movies that have portrayed the Aboriginal ‘story’ – such as the award-winning Canadian movie, *Black Robe* – have often conveyed it through a Eurocentric perspective, oftentimes portrayed with historical inaccuracies and omissions. These stories continue to shape the public perception of Aboriginal Peoples and their culture as an “artifact” relegated to history books. As Fleras explains, these notions of “what it is to be Canadian Aboriginal have lived well on past the emergence of a public consciousness.”<sup>20</sup>

In Canada, a limited number of television programs and documentaries that deal with Canadian Aboriginal life have been produced, most notably *North of 60* and *The Rez* in the 80s and 90s. But these types of programs are presently lacking on mainstream television.

The new Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN), established in 1999, has allowed for Aboriginal expression. Although APTN is accessible to mainstream audiences, one scholar has noted that there is still the symbolic sense of marginalization with the service assigned to number 72 on most cable systems, well out of range of the more popular cable channels.<sup>21</sup>

**ii. *Gendered Discrimination within Minorities***

It was not long ago that all women were significantly under-represented in television. Women of minority backgrounds, in particular, suffered even greater invisibility. The *Front & Centre* study (1994) by MediaWatch discovered that while women overall accounted for 33% of all characters in drama on Canadian

TV (both Canadian and American produced), minority women represented only 4.6% of all female characters, and visible minority men represented fully 12.7% of all male characters. A marked improvement since then is evidenced in *Silent on the Set* (2002), which indicated an approximately equal representation of visible minority backgrounds among both men and women.

Although the portrayal of visible minority women in the media has been largely unexplored, a few studies are revealing.<sup>22</sup> The *Front & Centre* study indicated that minority women in drama were likely to be cast in roles that were minor or stereotypical in nature; in the news, women were usually interviewed in the context of a racially or culturally specific story and were frequently identified as mothers or as victims of violence. M. Mahtani, citing Y. Jiwani (1992), contends that minority women are often portrayed as deceptive and sinister.<sup>23</sup> Y. Jiwani is currently researching the effects of such representations, specifically of Asian women, in popular television and film productions to better understand the media's role in the formation of identity among girls and women.<sup>24</sup>

### **iii. Portrayal of Muslim Women: Culture vs. Religion**

The views of one group of minority women regarding their portrayal in the media were documented in a focus group study of Muslim women: "The Portrayal of Muslim Women in Canadian Mainstream Media: A Community Based Analysis" (1998).<sup>25</sup> Funded by a number of Canadian Arab and Islamic advocacy groups and non-governmental organizations, the project sought to raise the awareness of Islamic culture and to illuminate the cultural biases in the representation of Muslim women in the media. Media images of Muslim women have often been constructs created through the "cultural lens of the western observer."<sup>26</sup> They have been portrayed as: "erotic, mysterious and exotic" – often in the context of a harem; as "oppressed"; as veiled, passive victims of an oppressive patriarchal system; and, as one study found more recently, in a context associated with terrorism, as "militant" – wearing a hijab with a gun and military clothing.<sup>27</sup>

Mainstream media have historically framed the representation of Muslim women within culturally specific traditions such as complete veiling, portraying it as an inequitable practice of a severe religion. Respondents from the focus groups noted that the blurring in the distinction between religion and culture, with a focus on particular cultural traditions – namely, those of the Middle East – has led the media to misrepresent Islam. The diversity among Muslims, they felt, was not reflected.<sup>28</sup> The media in their one-sided coverage have ignored those Islamic countries, such as Indonesia, which have large Muslim populations, and where women's rights have not been a central issue.<sup>29</sup> It was suggested that more thorough reporting of this issue would provide a more balanced portrayal of women and Islam, rather than a monolithic, stereotypical representation.

The impact of such generalizations and stereotypes on the self-image of Canadian Muslim women has reinforced a sense of “otherness.” As one respondent noted, “the adjectives used to describe Muslim women are strictly our external garb.” A lack of understanding was cited as the main reason behind the misrepresentation. As one woman stated, “When it comes to Muslim women, I still feel marginalized as if this person doesn't have a real understanding...they do generalize because they don't have a deep understanding of the whole issue...and when it is over you say well, ‘at least they didn’t say anything too terrible.’”<sup>30</sup>

#### **iv. White Aesthetic**

An important finding from the UK study, *Top Ten TV: Ethnic Minority Group Representation on Popular Television* reveals the continuation of a phenomenon long recognized as a prevailing norm in western media. The study examined the portrayal of Black women and concluded that these women were made to appear less “Black” than their male counterparts.

In the study, coders were asked to record the skin tone and features of all Black characters on television. They found that many Black women conformed to a more western sense of aesthetic or “white” idealization – a total 45% of the women were seen as having predominantly “western features” versus just 17% of their male counterparts. In addition, only 11% of the women were judged as having dark skin versus 30% of the Black males. This finding betrays the general state of representation of minority women: when women of visible backgrounds are presented, they are “reluctantly admitted to [the] screens.”<sup>31</sup> Minority women are judged according to dominant Eurocentric standards of idealized beauty, to which their male counterparts are not subjected.<sup>32</sup>

Canadian representation has also been accused of the same kind of watered down diversity in this comment on minority representation in television news: “The reality is that we’re seeing somebody from a certain ethnic group who in fact looks so much like Peter Mansbridge or whomever; they’re looking as much like the dominant culture as they can.”<sup>33</sup> Differences, Fleras claims, are not taken seriously and diverse faces reflect a “kind of pretend pluralism.”<sup>34</sup> Diversity in skin colour or features, he continues, is acceptable only if it is lighter or more “Caucasian,” and therefore less “intimidating.”

## **v. *The Absence of Interracial Relationships***

Interracial relationships are also seen by many observers to be notably absent on television.<sup>35</sup> M. Mahtani has noted that if mixed-race relationships are depicted on television, they are rarely seen as problem-free.<sup>36</sup> A US study in 1994 found that intimacy was less prevalent between Black characters than white, and that no scenes depicting interracial intimacy occurred at all.<sup>37</sup>

Interracial relationships constitute a growing reality in Canada. According to Statistics Canada, intermarriages between a visible minority person and someone of non-visible minority status increased 26% from 1991 to 2001, particularly in large urban centres such as Vancouver and Toronto. Many note that this reality is not presently reflected on Canadian television.

## **C. *Framing of Minorities as “Problem People” in the News***

The media's influence in shaping popular perceptions and influencing the collective belief system of Canadian society is acknowledged by many researchers. Therefore, the construction of an “us” versus “them” framework through the selective and subtle use of language and images is seen as a powerful influence in the development of a negative image of ethnocultural and racial communities. This in turn is identified as generating resentment against visible minorities, thereby affecting mainstream public sentiment and political responses with regard to immigration and social policies.<sup>38</sup>

The research of F. Henry and C. Tator in Canada has shown how structures of inequality and ethnic prejudices can be seen as manifest in everyday discourse in news coverage. They do not emphasize that individual journalists or editors are consciously racist or prejudiced, but rather that there exists institutional racism, whereby racism is present in the policies, practices, procedures, values and norms that operate within an organization or institution. From this premise, racialized assumptions and beliefs remain invisible, ultimately maintaining the status quo of a “white dominant ideology.”<sup>39</sup>

Henry and Tator argue that there is a “lack of awareness, understanding or concern” on the part of those who work in the media regarding their role in contributing to racism and that they often resist criticism of their own practices.<sup>40</sup> The authors state that, in Canada, there remains a persistent denial of systemic racism, which is “deeply manifest in the fabric of Canadian culture and is a part of all social, economic and political systems.” Denial of racism among all opinion makers is, they claim, “so habitual that making the allegation of racism and raising the possibility of its influence on social outcomes becomes a serious social infraction.”<sup>41</sup>

### ***i. Anti-immigrant Sentiment***

Media research in the form of discourse or content analyzes, primarily of print media, has suggested that problematic depictions and biased news reporting of immigrants and ethnocultural and racial minorities are ubiquitous. These studies present evidence that immigrants are often portrayed as ‘problem people,’ and as social or economic threats. They are shown as people who take advantage of the benevolence of the Canadian government and tax national resources, and who are a threat to Canadian national interests and to the Canadian sense of identity.

The media are often found to portray immigrants and racial minorities as “foreigners” who are “non-assimilable and not wanting to or having the capacity to be ‘like us.’”<sup>42</sup> Their culture is portrayed “either as exotic residues which can be brought out of the closet and celebrated periodically, or as residues of the past which have no meaning in contemporary society.”<sup>43</sup> Fleras speaks of the “miscasting of developing world minorities” and how people and countries of the Third World are presented negatively in stories of catastrophe, crisis, conflict or corruption with an indifference to any sense of the history, causes or context. These depictions reinforce stereotypes of Third World minorities as backwards, uncivilized, and under-developed while framing the West as the well-intentioned “agency of modernization and improvement.” The values of the West and of white dominant society, Henry and Tator argue, are therefore sustained at the cost of immigrants and racial minorities who become marginalized in society.<sup>44</sup>

A content analysis (1986), that examined national newspaper coverage of Canada’s immigration policy between 1980 and 1985, concluded that the subtle (almost subliminal) use of language and other techniques betrayed an anti-immigrant and racist sentiment. The reports analyzed in the study tended to emphasize the perceived costs and problems of immigrants as taxing the Canadian system, suggesting an “immigration problem.” More recent studies noted below report that subtle mechanisms supporting systemic racism still exist in the media.

One study conducted by P. Hwang (former student at McGill University) examined media coverage surrounding the arrival of the Chinese “boat people” off the coast of British Columbia in 1999. Her analysis identified an anti-immigrant sentiment fuelled by media representations, in which an “immigration crisis” or “national problem” had been manufactured in the news.<sup>45</sup>

Hwang suggests that a “national interest” perspective, which stressed the need to protect national security, emerged in much of the coverage. News items

contained highly xenophobic undertones and were seen as biased due to a prejudgment of the migrants as non-legitimate, alien, dehumanized and illegal. A photo and discourse analysis found racist undertones in the media coverage of the event. The use of particular language, which described the migrants as objects or natural catastrophes (e.g., “wave,” “flow,” “a crate of China dolls,” “washed-up Chinamen”) was viewed as dehumanizing and evoked a sense of social crisis. Similarly, news photos of the migrants wearing handcuffs and prison clothes and being guarded with dogs was seen to confirm them as criminals. Hwang argues that the labeling of these Chinese migrants as “criminal” legitimized the government’s decision to imprison and eventually deport them.

Although a positive trend has been noted in the coverage of Islam since the attacks of the World Trade Centre,<sup>46</sup> over-generalization and sensationalism in many news items associating Islam with fanaticism, violence and terrorism has been widely documented. The media-watch group of the Canadian Islamic Congress (CIC) recently released its fifth annual report (December 2002) on anti-Islam coverage in several Canadian newspapers (and a pilot study examining television news). Their analysis identified negative terminology associated with Islam that was seen to perpetuate a distorted perception that Islam “condones and encourages violence.”

The literature states that Muslims, in general, have been systematically portrayed in a negative manner in mainstream media in the context of relations between Islam and the West. Representations of Muslims focused on either geography or ethnicity, primarily of the Arab world. Particular note has been made regarding the use of “Arab” and “Middle East” as synonymous with “Muslim” in mainstream Western culture.

Such bias, the CIC claims, can instigate hate against a minority group, affect the well-being of individuals, and result in “feelings of insecurity and a loss of confidence in their identity.” Certainly, the perception among some Arabs is that Canadians do not view them positively. In a survey conducted by the Canadian Arab Foundation, “Arabs in Canada: Proudly Canadian and Marginalized” (April, 2002), 41% of Arabs agreed that Canadians don’t like Muslims, while 33% agreed that Canadians don’t like Arabs. When asked whether Canadians’ knowledge of Arab culture stems from negative myths and stereotypes, 93% either strongly or somewhat agreed.

## ***ii. Racialization of Crime***

Numerous discourses analyze point to the pervasive “racialization” of crime in Canadian print media.<sup>47</sup> Case studies have found examples of biased language linking particular racial and cultural communities with crime and violence. Consistent coverage of this kind results in the production and reinforcement of stereotypes of particular racial groups, which are seen as more prone to culturally deviant behaviour and inferior in their values. This type of labeling in

the news is also cited as producing a sense of moral panic and fear of the “Other,” separating minorities from full participation in Canadian society.

An interesting finding from a study conducted for the *Canadian Daily Newspaper Association* (1995) on visible minority readership addressed how these groups “read” newspapers differently than the mainstream. While the objective of the study was to better understand visible minority readership, the findings revealed dissatisfaction with mainstream news coverage among visible minorities. Over half of the visible minority groups observed that minorities were treated unfairly in newspapers, and a large majority noted that media linked race and religion to crime reporting. The white respondents, in the same study, generally found the coverage to be fair.<sup>48</sup>

The Black community has been subject to a high degree of biased reporting according to the studies conducted by Henry and Tator. One study, *Profiling in Toronto: Discourses of Domination, Mediation and Opposition*, submitted to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation (March 2003), analyzed the discourses of over two hundred articles from the mainstream press and public authorities surrounding the issues of racial profiling, Black crime and policing. The discourses studied were instigated by the publication of the *Toronto Star* series on “Racial Profiling” (which began in October 2002).<sup>49</sup>

The study concluded that some newspapers framed the issue around the racialization or “Jamaicanization” of crime and the belief that “Black crime is the reason that the police have to exercise constant vigilance within certain groups whose deviant actions threaten the social order.”<sup>50</sup> The news stories on Blacks and Jamaicans as criminals were identified as reinforcing existing stereotypes and entrenching racist notions among readers. A previous study of three Toronto newspapers by Henry in 1999 indicated that 54% of all articles that were related to criminal activity used the word Jamaican – and that 46% of stories about drug offences referred to East Asian and Vietnamese drug gangs.

The premise of Henry and Tator’s study is that discourse plays a role in the social construction and preservation of the dominant mainstream and the legitimization of systems of inequality. The *Racial Profiling* study also reported that systemic racism is deeply embedded in institutional systems and structures as evidenced by the strong denial any systemic or structural racism on the part of police authorities.

Fleras notes that Aboriginal people have often been portrayed in the news as deviant and as “troublesome constituents whose claims for self-determination and inherent self-government are contrary to Canada’s liberal-democratic tradition.”<sup>51</sup> As such, he suggests that the First Nations are portrayed as threats to national interests, social order, and as an economic liability.<sup>52</sup> Often cited examples are the coverage of the “Oka Crisis” and the conflict over Aboriginal versus non-Aboriginal fishing rights, in which the mainstream press coverage was perceived to be framing Aboriginal People within the themes of criminality and conflict, evoking images of fierce Native warriors and focusing on aspects of violence.<sup>53</sup> Such portrayals can be expected to have long-standing negative effects on people’s perceptions. With few mediating images between the “fierce warrior” and the “drunken and unruly native” in the news, negative stereotypes of Aboriginal Peoples as a “problem people” are continually being reinforced.

#### **D. Media Sites of Cultural Production: Understanding Systemic Issues**

Understanding the sites and contexts of the social production of media has been the focus of several recent academic papers. Many scholars in Canada have called for more research into understanding the mechanisms through which distorted and stereotypical representations of ethnic minorities are produced in the media.<sup>54</sup>

Over the last few years, the broadcasting sector has seen improvements in the numbers of visible minorities in its ranks. Despite increases in overall numbers however, recent academic studies argue that the white dominant class continues to dominate the upper levels of management. In non-broadcast news organizations, where the tracking of numbers of designated minorities in the workforce is not mandated through the Employment Equity Act, representation behind the scenes is still relatively low.

In the view of some scholars, media workers are still “largely bound by the dominant cultures within which they operate, including embedded societal prejudices, stereotypes, and populist frames of thinking.”<sup>55</sup> They contend that dominant ideologies still exist in sites of production determining the decisions regarding what is represented and which stories are to be told. Without diversity of opinions, debate is restricted to prevailing viewpoints, resulting in a limited number of stories relating to ethnic groups. As these scholars have noted, the “experiences and events of ethnic minorities are often considered to be too specific to be of general interest, unless there is a story of normative deviance to tell.”

The institutional bias and barriers minority journalists report facing behind the scenes are documented in a summary of 20 interviews conducted among minority journalists in both electronic and print media (*Discourses of Domination*, Henry & Tator (2002)).<sup>56</sup> The study found that some journalists were uncomfortable in situations where they were expected to act as spokespersons for their particular ethnic or cultural group – they saw this as a

form of marginalization and racialization.<sup>57</sup> Conversely, some saw their position as working to their advantage, allowing them better access to stories than their white counterparts. While minority journalists are often perceived as experts on particular ethnic communities, they can also be accused of a lack of objectivity given their cultural background. The journalists concur with the findings of earlier studies that identify the greatest need for change is in the positions of power in management.

John Miller, Professor at the Ryerson School of Journalism, contends that structural, systemic change in the workplace, including hiring and retention of employees, is crucial in creating diversity and equity in the media. In a 1994 study he conducted on behalf of the Canadian Daily Newspaper Association (CDNA), now the Canadian Newspaper Association (CNA), Miller surveyed the ethnocultural and racial makeup of the newspaper industry.<sup>58</sup> He found that only 2.6% of the workforce was non-white. The study also revealed that 16 of the 41 papers surveyed had all-white staffs, and only 11 of the 41 papers stated they were strongly committed to hiring visible minorities. Miller claims that there is a direct link between the hiring of minority journalists and the quality of community coverage.

In 2000, a study by F. Sauvageau and D. Pritchard at Quebec's Laval University revealed that 97.3% of Canadian journalists across all media are white. Federico Barahono conducted the most recent Canadian inquiry into minority representation in the newsroom for the April 2001 issue of *Thunderbird Magazine*. In this article, Barahono interviewed the managing editors of papers that stated they understood that systemic and unconscious institutional barriers prevented improved representation of minority journalists.<sup>59</sup>

In summary, Fleras identified what he saw as four systemic causes to improving the portrayal of minorities in the media:<sup>60</sup>

1. *Institutional - Commercial Imperatives*: The imperatives of commercial media are to attract the largest perceived possible audience (presumed to have the same values as newsmakers themselves) and to generate advertising revenues. Resorting to formula is characteristic of the media, which must bend to financial pressures and meet deadlines.
2. *Institutional Dynamics (Systemic Stereotyping)*: Stereotypes are seen as the “simplistic explanation of the world that extends to all members of a category” and are used as a means of “codifying reality” to disseminate information and define situations in manageable ways. However, when

stereotypes result in exclusion and marginalization, they become detrimental to the well being of individuals and communities.

3. *Institutional Logic (Systemic Bias)*: Impersonal and unconscious, institutional bias is embedded in the structure (rules, organization), functions, (norms, goals) and process (procedures).
4. *Institutional Values*: Media institutions sustain dominant ideologies, normalizing certain viewpoints as natural, normal and acceptable.

Fleras has long purported that the media industry works within a “boxed-in reality,” that it is, fundamentally, based on commercial ethics and not on moral responsibility. He states that we need to acknowledge that TV is commercially driven and its survival is dependent upon advertising revenues and commercial restraints. With regard to entertainment programming, he states that they “may strive for realism but cannot necessarily be held accountable for reflecting reality... we are accusing it of not doing something that it is not structured to do.” Essentially seen as an entertainment medium, programming that deals with complex issues is avoided because it is “inconsistent with the happy-face subliminalities conveyed in advertising.” Fear of alienating audiences or repelling advertisers is one of the major barriers preventing inclusion of minorities.

## End Notes

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<sup>1</sup> A. Fleras and J. L. Kunz (2001).

<sup>2</sup> M. Mahtani (2001).p.3.

<sup>3</sup> For news programming: television commercials and news shows on mainstream Canadian television were taped between September 1 and October 3 2001. A second, one week taping was conducted in January 2002. The stations included CBC, CTV0/CFTO, Global and CityTV, 6 p.m. or the 11:00 p.m. news. For entertainment programming: six television dramas were taped. Four episodes of all shows were taped, except the sixth show, of which two episodes were taped: Cold Squad, Paradise Falls, North of 60, Eleventh Hour, and Da Vinci's Inquest; the sixth was The New DeGrassi. See Frances Henry and Carol Tator's website for more information on their current areas of research: <http://www.yorku.ca/fhenry/research.htm>.

<sup>4</sup> Y. Jiwani (1995).

<sup>5</sup> H. May (2002), p.13.

<sup>6</sup> A. Fleras (1995).

<sup>7</sup> Fleras and Kunz (2001), p.98.

<sup>8</sup> C. Murray (2002), p.16.

<sup>9</sup> *Top Ten TV* (2001).

<sup>10</sup> In *French Cultural Studies* (2002), xiii, pp. 293-307.

<sup>11</sup> Fleras and Kunz (2001), p. 101.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>13</sup> Republished on Media Awareness Network website: [http://www.education-medias.ca/english/resources/research\\_documents/reports/diversity/muslim\\_women\\_media.cfm](http://www.education-medias.ca/english/resources/research_documents/reports/diversity/muslim_women_media.cfm).

<sup>14</sup> p. 5.

<sup>15</sup> *The BBC leading cultural change for a rich and diverse UK*, speech made at Race in the Media Awards 7/4/2000: [www.bbc.org.uk/info/news/news233.htm](http://www.bbc.org.uk/info/news/news233.htm)

<sup>16</sup> *Silent on the Set* (2002) measured 69 hours of dramatic programming and indicates that representation has indeed improved on Canadian television programming. It reported an incidence of minority representation at 12%, a percentage that corresponds roughly to the visible minority population present in Canada at 13.4%.

<sup>17</sup> C. Murray quoted as speaker *Diversity & Broadcasting Workshop*, Canadian Heritage: Strategic and Policy Research Directorate. March, 2003.

<sup>18</sup> Fleras and Kunz (2001).

<sup>19</sup> "Common Portrayals of Aboriginal People" on Media Awareness Network.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>21</sup> A. Fleras quoted as speaker at *Diversity & Broadcasting Workshop*, Canadian Heritage: Strategic and Policy Research Directorate, March, 2003.

<sup>22</sup> See Mahtani (2001), p. 6.

<sup>23</sup> Mahtani (2001)

<sup>24</sup> Yasmin Jiwani, Assistant Professor at Concordia University. Forthcoming publication.

<sup>25</sup> Report of the Afghan Women's Organization. Republished on Media Awareness Network: [http://www.education-](http://www.education-medias.ca/english/resources/research_documents/reports/diversity/muslim_women_media.cfm)

[medias.ca/english/resources/research\\_documents/reports/diversity/muslim\\_women\\_media.cfm](http://www.education-medias.ca/english/resources/research_documents/reports/diversity/muslim_women_media.cfm)

<sup>26</sup> Jafri, G.J. (1998). "The Portrayal of Muslim Women in Canadian Mainstream Media: A Community-Based Analysis."

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 6.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 13.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*, p.12.

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- <sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23-45.
- <sup>31</sup> *Top Ten TV*, p.33.
- <sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>33</sup> Wendy Hill quoted from 37<sup>th</sup> Parliament, 2<sup>nd</sup> Session, Standing Committee on Canadian Heritage, November 21, 2002.
- <sup>34</sup> Fleras (2001), p.148.
- <sup>35</sup> Mahtani citing Goodal *et al. Racism, Ethnicity and the Media* (Sydney, 1994)
- <sup>36</sup> Mahtani (2001) reference to Mahtani *Mapping the Paradoxes of Multiethnicity: Stories of Multiethnic Women in Toronto, Canada*, Ph.D. Thesis, Dept. of Geography, University College, London, London (2000).
- <sup>37</sup> Mahtani (2001).
- <sup>38</sup> Mahtani (2001), and Henry and Tator (2000).
- <sup>39</sup> Henry and Tator (2001).
- <sup>40</sup> Henry and Tator (2000) and (2002)
- <sup>41</sup> *Ibid.* p.3
- <sup>42</sup> Mahtani (2001).
- <sup>43</sup> Mahtani (2001)
- <sup>44</sup> Henry and Tator (2000), p. 57.
- <sup>45</sup> P. Hwang, p.3. Media sample covered a random selection of 123 Can English language print media between July 21 and October 22, 1999. J. Greenberg (2000). "Opinion Discourse and Canadian Newspapers: The Case of the Chinese 'Boat People,' cited in Mahtani (2001).
- <sup>46</sup> Shanahina Siddiqui, senior editor of the Canadian division of the Council on American Islamic Relations, quoted in *UBC Journalism Review: Thunderbird Online Magazine*, March 2002, vol. IV, issue III.
- <sup>47</sup> Racialization is defined as "a process of categorization through which social relations between people [are] structured by the signification of human biological characteristics in such a way as to define and construct differentiated social collectivities." F. Henry and C. Tator (2001), p. 12.
- <sup>48</sup> See CDNA website. <http://www.cna-acj.ca/client/cna/cna.nsf/web/CDNAStudy>.
- <sup>49</sup> F. Henry and C. Tator (2003). *Racial Profiling in Toronto: Discourses of Domination, Mediation, and Opposition*. Final Draft Submitted to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation. [Online] Retrieved Oct. 6, 2003. [http://www.crr.ca/en/Publications/ResearchReports/doc/ePub\\_RacialProfiling\\_FinalDraft.pdf](http://www.crr.ca/en/Publications/ResearchReports/doc/ePub_RacialProfiling_FinalDraft.pdf)
- <sup>50</sup> F. Henry and C. Tator (2003). *Racial Profiling in Toronto: Discourses of Domination, Mediation, and Opposition*. Final Draft Submitted to the Canadian Race Relations Foundation, p.57.
- <sup>51</sup> *Criminals and Castaways: Minorities as a "Social Problem"* Excerpted from A. Fleras, "Please Adjust Your Set." (1995)
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>53</sup> *Ibid.* And see Mahtani, "Representing Minorities: Canadian Media and Minority Identities," in *Ethnic Identity and Cultural Spectacles in Canada, Special Issue Diversity and Identity* xxxiii, no.3 (2001), p. 6.
- <sup>54</sup> Fleras and Kunz (2001).
- <sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>56</sup> Mahtani (forthcoming) interviewed several women journalists, including journalists of colour, to examine their understandings of ethnic minority portrayal in the media.
- <sup>57</sup> p. 64.
- <sup>58</sup> J. Miller, "A Report on Diversity in Canadian Newsrooms" (1994). Republished on Media Awareness Network.
- <sup>59</sup> "Ethnic and Visible Minorities in the News." Republished on Media Awareness Network. See [http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/ethnics\\_and\\_minorities/minorities\\_news.cfm](http://www.media-awareness.ca/english/issues/stereotyping/ethnics_and_minorities/minorities_news.cfm)
- <sup>60</sup> Fleras (2001), p.149-150.

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