

Cultural Diversity on Television

Phase IB - Background Research *Overview of Other Jurisdictions*

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I. Introduction

This section of Phase I research summarizes academic literature and studies relating to media-minority relations in the United States, Australia, the United Kingdom and countries belonging to the European Union. An overview of these countries, which face similar issues in representing culturally and racially diverse populations, provides a broader context to understanding media-minority relations in Canada, albeit each of the countries has its own distinct population composition and immigration and policy frameworks relating to multiculturalism or cultural pluralism (e.g., the particular issue of racial integration of Blacks and whites in the US).

Within this context, Canada is unique. It remains the only officially multicultural country in the world and has taken steps to implement policies that promote better representation across many levels of society. Canada has faced the challenges of increasing cultural and racial diversity due to recent changing immigrant patterns. But it has also recognized the imperative for the representation of its own diverse Aboriginal population and has taken a progressive step in establishing the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network.

With this in mind, this summary review also looks at media initiatives from other countries and provides references to online resources that could prove useful as Canadian broadcasters move forward in improving cultural and racial representation on Canadian television screens.¹

II. Overview of Cultural Diversity and Media in Other Countries

A. Cultural Diversity and the Media in the US

After decades of affirmative action and lobbying by minority groups, the broadcasting industry in the US has undergone significant organizational change with regard to equity issues. Many experts, however, state that the commercial viability of cultural diversity in the marketplace has also been a catalyst. In fact, cultural diversity in the US has been likened to a form of “corporate multiculturalism,”² where the bottom line, rather than social justice, has been the driving force of change. Economic motives prompted network stations such as Fox, and later UPN and Warner Brothers (WB), to target the Black demographic and young hip white youth with Black-cast programming.

The Equal Employment Opportunity rules of the Federal Communications Commission (FCC) were first established in 1968 to effect diversity in television by increasing the number of minorities working in the industry. This model is upheld by the National Association for the Advancement of Coloured People (NAACP), which states that “once integration took place behind the camera in executive and decision-making positions, the proper portrayal of the American public would naturally evolve.”³ FCC rules imposing significant obligations on broadcasters to promote equal employment opportunities came into effect in March 2003.⁴ These new EEO rules come years after constitutional challenges by broadcasters that resulted in the suspension of EEO rules for monitoring employment numbers of visible minorities and affirmative action in 1998. These new rules focused on outreach and the dissemination of information regarding broadcasting employment opportunities to the community, and imposed certain recordkeeping and reporting obligations on the part of broadcasters.

The abundance of quantitative research conducted in the US has provided advocacy groups with the data to take action against the networks. As part of its largely successful lobbying efforts conducted in conjunction with The Screen Actor’s Guild (SAG), in 1999 the NAACP launched a campaign charging the networks with a “virtual whitewash” and threatened a national boycott against one or all four of the television networks. Ensuing negotiations in January 2000 resulted in agreements between the major networks and the NAACP and other coalition groups representing Latinos, Asian Americans and Native Americans. The networks agreed to implement of initiatives including the development of minority internship programs, expansion of “ethnic minority” recruitment drives, increased business

with minority-owned companies, and linkage of executive compensation with the fulfilment of diversity responsibilities.

A recent report by the Multi-Ethnic Media Coalition released in October 2003 revealed that some improvement has been made in the representation of minorities on the four major networks (ABC, NBC, CBS and Fox). In previous years the networks were assigned near failing grades for their efforts to employ minority actors, writers and directors, their procurement policies and their networks' commitment to diversity initiatives.⁵

Recent content analysis studies have revealed that effecting change in the representation of ethnocultural and racial minorities onscreen has been slow, however, and that the issues of ghettoization and segregation of Blacks on television persist. The study conducted by UCLA, *Primetime in Black & White: Making Sense of the 2001 Fall Season*, revealed that white and Black presence dominated the screen at prime-time, with 76% and 16% respectively. Blacks were overrepresented when compared to real population statistics at 12%, while other ethnic minorities were underrepresented - 2% for Latinos and 3% for Asians against 13% and 4% of the nation's population, respectively. Native Americans were invisible with no presence during prime time.

Although "multi-racial" casts were high at 92%, closer examination of the numbers revealed that minority characters tended to play secondary or tertiary roles. The study also suggested that Black characters were ghettoized on the least watched network – UPN – and in the least-rated time slots – Monday and Saturday nights. Blacks were also more likely to play roles in situation comedies. These findings were confirmed by the *Fall Colours Study 2001-2002*, conducted by Children Now, an organization committed to issues concerning children, including the effects of television on the formation of children's social identity. This study found family life played a minimal role in storylines with Asian/Pacific Islanders, Latinos or Native Americans, and that the majority of white youth interacted with their parents, while only a fourth of Latino youth did.

Some issues of racial representation are unique to the US. Niche marketing and the belief that audiences are drawn to programs that reflect themselves have resulted in increasing segmentation and segregation of primetime between Black and white shows. It has been argued, however, that viewing patterns among Black and white viewers have converged in the US due to the multi-ethnic casting in the most popular television programs. This is supported by the comment of SAG President William Daniels, "We hope to convince industry insiders that diversity can improve

their bottom line...We believe many producers and programmers are missing opportunities to reach a larger, broader audience through more diverse casting.”

B. Cultural Diversity and the Media in the United Kingdom

With a decline in audience numbers among multicultural viewers who have turned to satellite and cable TV programs, and with pressure from the Government to address social inclusion, Britain’s leading broadcasters formed The Cultural Diversity Network (CDN) in 2000. It launched an action plan, “Changing the Face of Television – Manifesto,” aimed at “modernizing the portrayal of ethnocultural and racial minorities in mainstream programming so that racial diversity on and behind the screen would reflect today’s multicultural Britain.”⁶ Participating broadcasters issued action plans that included monitoring and improving onscreen portrayals, as well as setting targets to improve representation in the employment of ethnocultural and racial minorities in the production environment. Initiatives were also set up by four of the seven broadcasters to encourage recruitment practices and products that would increase cultural diversity of programming in the independent sector.

The BBC has been very successful in improving cultural diversity within its organization relative to other media organizations in the EU. Its commitment is demonstrated by the establishment of the Department of Equal Opportunities in 1988, whose aim was to increase the proportion of employees from disadvantaged groups to proportions corresponding to their representation in the general population. The numbers illustrate that the BBC has made progress with 8.7% of its workforce now drawn from cultural and racial minorities, a figure close to its 10% target set for the end of 2003. In upper management, the figure is 3.4% against a target of 4%. Channel 4, similarly, has achieved some success in its commitment to cultural diversity. Of its general workforce, 9% represented cultural and racial minorities; among programming and management, 5.8% were minorities.

These numbers can be compared to the actual minority ethnic population which measured 7.6% of the total population of the United Kingdom in 2001/02, according to the Office for National Statistics, UK. People from minority ethnic groups made up 9% in England, while nearly half (48%) of this total minority ethnic population lived in the London region, where they comprised 29% cent of all residents.⁷

At the BBC, several programs aimed at recruiting and encouraging talent have been implemented including: *Ascend*, a training course for ethnic minorities within

the corporation; a joint scheme between the University of Westminster and BBC Sport that took on 12 trainees; *BBC Mentor Project*, a joint initiative between BBC Resources, BBC Production, BBC Broadcast, BBC News and Hammersmith and West London College; and *BBC Talent*, a program aimed at encouraging diverse talent, from production trainees and science experts to comedy sketch writers and filmmakers.

Despite these initiatives and the well-intentioned efforts of broadcasters, critics claim there has still been little change since the formation of the CDN among many broadcasting companies. British broadcasting has been accused of “institutional racism,” according to one source.⁸ Systemic issues still persist, as another source stated that, “There is an unspoken reality that, although I look different from you, I must act, think and speak the same as you, which is then promoted as diversity.”⁹ Results from the Independent Television Commission suggest that many of the UK’s leading television companies have actually reduced the numbers of ethnic employees in their programming and management departments. Cited were seven ITV franchises, which had no minority staff and Channel 4, which saw a fall from 8.2% ethnic minorities on staff in 2000 to 5.7% in 2001.

A recent report by Paula Watson at the Advance Programme at the National Film and Television School, entitled *Pitch Black: From the Margin to the Mainstream* (2001), has also noted that there has been a decline of cultural diversity among broadcast employees, producers and broadcast suppliers over the last ten years. She argues that more far reaching initiatives need to be implemented to change the face of broadcasting beyond the “cosmetic level.” Her study discusses and makes a case for the commercial viability and cultural value of increasing Black-owned production companies in the broadcasting industry.

In addition, content analysis studies of British television have shown that onscreen representation does not reflect social reality. In the study *Top Ten TV* (commissioned by the Commission for Racial Equality), which analyzed the ten most viewed television programs over a four-week period in 2000, ethnocultural and racial representation was 5.2%, compared to 6.7% of real-world population estimates during this time period (the number is boosted to 8.4% with the inclusion of people on US programmes and by ethnic minority visitors). It also found that ethnocultural and racial minorities were marginalized, contributing to only 5.7% of major roles in the overall sample. The findings also suggest tokenism, with 26% of ethnic contributions coded as “personal experience” or “subject too brief to classify” compared to 11% of the white base sample. Other ethnic groups were significantly underrepresented, including Asians who comprised only 0.9% of speaking roles on

Top Ten TV programs, while making up 3.7% of the UK population.

The social impact of such under-representation and misrepresentation was addressed in the focus group study *Include Me In* (1999) which concluded that viewers from ethnic backgrounds were dissatisfied with the representation of minorities on television. The effects of negative depictions were seen “to reinforce a negative sense of self, as well as setting up limited social expectations for minorities.”¹⁰

Despite criticism and evidence of low representation, the *More Colour in the Media* (1999) study stated that Britain represents a model of best practices in this area compared with other countries in the European Union that conducted a comparative analysis of policies and initiatives granting minority access into the broadcasting industry. The BBC in particular and its Equal Opportunities Department was singled out as a leader in documenting the representation of minorities in broadcasting for years. Official structures, which provide a framework for monitoring and supporting the presence of minorities in the broadcasting industry, have yet to be established in other EU countries.

Recent research such as *Include Me In* (1999), *Multicultural Broadcasting: Concept and Reality* (2002), a qualitative report examining audience and industry attitudes towards multicultural broadcasting, and the annual *Monitoring Reports* (from 1992 onwards), all commissioned by the Broadcasting Standards Commission, demonstrates that cultural diversity is an integral part of broadcasting policy in the UK. Over the years these studies have encouraged public debates on issues related to representation and have ultimately led to improvements in the portrayal of minorities.

C. Cultural Diversity and the Media in Australia

In the early 1990s, research on cultural diversity indicated that Australian television lacked significant representation of actors from culturally diverse backgrounds (i.e. non Anglo-Saxon backgrounds). Dramatic programs in particular portrayed a very “Anglo” image of Australia.

Against this context, The Broadcasting Services Act 1992 was established “to promote the role of broadcasting services in developing and reflecting a sense of Australian identity, character and cultural diversity.” In addition, the Federation of Australian Commercial Television Stations (FACTS) Code of Practice (revised 1999) and the new Australian Content Standard (1999), which included cultural diversity clauses, were implemented.

There continues to be a level of dissatisfaction, however, among advocacy groups. Nonetheless, the industry, fearing a system of quotas, has rejected any form of monitoring employment numbers or the implementation of equity measures.

Recent studies indicate that some improvements have been made since the establishment of the Australian Broadcasting Authority (ABA), which facilitates the self-regulation of various media industries, including commercial television. Based on the findings of *Cultural Diversity in Australian Television Drama* (2002), cultural and racial minority actors represent 26% of the total cast members compared to 2% in 1992.¹¹ A certain degree of marginalization was observed, with a higher representation of minority actors in guest roles rather than in main roles. The study also showed an increase in Asians playing roles, with a total of eight actors – two in lead roles and six in guest/supporting roles. This was in sharp contrast to the findings of the *Report on Casting in Australian Commercial Television Drama* (2000), which found that actors of Asian background were completely absent. The presence of two Indigenous “sustaining” actors who played non-ethnically specific roles was noted, representing 1.1% of the total sample.

The Broadcast in Colour: Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries (1999) study by H. May also suggested that the majority of NESB (non-English speaking background) actors tended to be NESB 2 (non-English speaking background, born in Australia). This supported the hypothesis that children from established migrant groups are able to successfully make their way onto the screen. The research thus indicates that cultural diversity is becoming more accepted in mainstream television, albeit this diversity is characterized by actors mostly of European backgrounds.

The *Broadcast in Colour* study also sought to determine whether cultural background played a role in the casting process and the development of story lines. The study found that stories or characters were no longer presented with a focus on cultural background or culturally defined issues, and that actors were not generally cast in roles related to their cultural background, except in the case of guest roles. In interviews with actors from culturally diverse backgrounds, May observed that many did not wish to have their ethnic background highlighted but preferred playing non-specific roles. This suggests that the second generation of migrant families tend to “culturally integrate” into the Australian community.

Despite improvements in the onscreen representation of culturally diverse actors,

Australian cultural diversity on television was identified as falling far behind that of the US and the UK. Explicit programs and policies in these countries, May

states, have led to significant improvements in representing cultural diversity on television. He adds, however, that improvements in the UK and the US have been spurred on by commercial objectives.

In a 2001 report by SBS, Australia's mandated multicultural channel, G. Abbott identified fundamental gaps in current audience research. He states that there is currently a lack of understanding of the differences in general attitudes between the dominant mainstream and those of people of colour.¹² He argues that better research methods could garner information to better inform all broadcasters in making programming decisions to reach culturally diverse markets.

Although SBS is unique among Australian broadcasters, its research taps into an understanding of its audience in a way that could be applied across the industry. Recent research conducted by SBS revealed that generational change has affected the formation of social identity and behaviour among young third-generation Australians from culturally diverse families.

Similarly, The Institute of Cultural Research in Western Sydney is exploring how young people from Middle Eastern and Asian communities construct and express their identities. "The industry," Abbott states, "could benefit from research that is more sensitive to cultural diversity...The outcome might be a flow through into diversity of the content of Australian television."

D. Initiatives and Media Research in the EU

In response to the development and growth of the European Union, the integration and inclusion of cultural and racial minorities have been a priority of social policy. Efforts have focused on the media in particular because of its role in shaping the self-image and perceptions of minorities. Joint policy and media research initiatives and programs have resulted in a growing body of studies on the issues of media-minority relations across Europe. These are aimed at understanding and dealing with increasing diasporas (migrant populations) and countering racism and xenophobia.

New trans-national initiatives and projects illustrate the fundamental desire to exchange experiences and strategies among the EU countries. However, the conditions in each country vary too greatly to transfer standard practices from one country to another. Divergent conditions pose the greatest challenge and demand that each country adapt learning from each other. Various countries are still in the process of developing effective strategies.

Below is a list of the key partnered initiatives that have been launched in the European Union. The On-line/More Colour in the Media Initiative, in particular, has made significant headway in sharing research, opening dialogue between the

media industry and researchers, and spearheading initiatives to help improve the access of minorities in the media. It is a comprehensive resource for information online.

i. On-line/More Colour in the Media Initiative

On-line/More Colour in the Media, a European umbrella organization consisting of an informal network of broadcasters, training institutes, and multicultural organizations has focused its activities over the last few years bringing organizations together to share ideas, information and methodologies.

Formed in 1996 and based in Utrecht (Netherlands) under the coordination of STOA - STICHTING Omroep Allochtonen – (Research NGO), they have played a major role in developing trans-European comparative research projects concerning employment, training, production, research and media-education of cultural and racial minorities. Its approach has been inclusive and international in scope and perspective. They have set up a network of researchers with the aim of exchanging ideas, expertise, and best practices between various EU countries.

One of its initiatives has been the online Multicultural Skyscraper website, an information gateway that contains information and lists of organizations relating to ethnocultural and racial minorities and media issues, including:

- Lists, links and search tools,
- Web journals, news and e-zines,
- Research institutes and relevant publications,
- New media and the issue of cultural diversity,
- Reporting media portrayal: media watch and monitoring, and
- NGO'S, guidance and examples of good practice.

ii. Research and Trans-National Initiatives

The following is a list of a few of the key projects conducted over the last few years (all downloadable from the Multicultural Skyscraper website. See <http://www.multicultural.net/>):

More Colour in the Media - Employment and access of ethnic minorities to the television industry in Germany, the UK, France, the Netherlands and Finland (March, 1999) by J. Ouaj, The European Institute for the Media.

This research project includes the findings of separate research efforts, with a number of concrete recommendations addressed to various levels of institutions – i.e., public, private and regional broadcasters, training institutions, social and political foundations, governments and government agencies, minority organizations, within respective national contexts and for Europe as a whole.

This joint study was conducted by the European Institute for the Media based in Dusseldorf (EIM), and the European Centre for Work and Society based in Brussels (ECWS). The publication covers issues relating to the access of ethnocultural and racial minorities in the television industry in these five European countries: Germany, the United Kingdom, France, the Netherlands and Finland.

A comparative research project, it analyzes the educational structures, the employment market in the media industry, and policy initiatives with regard to cultural and racial minorities in various countries. It also analyzes accessibility barriers in the television industry and evaluates existing initiatives in Europe. A comprehensive list of recommendations on best practices was made to political, social and media policy institutions with the responsibility or ability to influence change.

Tuning into Diversity. Immigrants and Ethnic Minorities in Mass Media: Representation and Policies (2001-2002)

This trans-national research project was led by a partnership of organizations – researchers, academics and NGOs from Italy, France, the Netherlands and the United Kingdom. The result was a provisional model of an approach to plan, implement and monitor a code of practice – a template that could be used as a reference.

The study included five components in total:

1. A media content analysis on the representation of ethnocultural and racial minorities in television programs and print publications in Italy (Censis Research in Italy)
2. A mapping and analysis of multicultural productions in radio, TV and print media in Italy (COSPE, NGO, Italy)
3. A historical overview of European research and conferences on media and minorities, evaluating their outcomes and impact, and a selection of "good practice" in Europe. Also included is a "blueprint" for media and minority policies in European countries. (STOA, multicultural media NGO, Netherlands)

4. An analysis of codes of conduct and practices in order to arrive at a systematic approach to planning, implementing and controlling codes of practice on media portrayal of ethnocultural and racial minorities. (Researchers from University of Bradford, UK)
5. An analysis of three case studies on diversity in the media:
 - a. From France - role of codes of conduct and practices concerning youth and children's rights specifically. It also included a case study in reception analysis among young television viewers (mostly of immigrant background). (Research NGO Grrem France);
 - b. From Italy – a review of legislation and role of codes of conduct. (COSPE);
 - c. From the Netherlands - an analysis of government policy and legislation and industry charters and policies. Included also is an overview of initiatives and good practices on media and minorities across Europe (STOA).

Empowerment and Media Watch Network (2001)

The objective of this project was to open dialogue about societal and media representations of diversity, to encourage minority NGOs to take up media watch efforts, to exchange methodologies, and to promote media education among multicultural audiences.

To date, this project has compiled the strategies and initiatives of a number of non-governmental organizations that have been successful in countering negative portrayal in the media. A “rolling” handbook presenting good practices in empowerment projects and concrete strategies for minority NGOs is currently being developed.

A European pilot media watch project, the *European Day of Media Monitoring*, took place on a trans-national scale in 2003. This was the first in what will become an annual event in which migrant and refugee organizations monitored the media for one full day. The event is meant to provide NGOs with credible data to be used as “evidence” to exert pressure on media to change existing practices and on governments to establish institutional frameworks of media conduct and practice.

On-line/More Diversity in the Media (1995-1999)

From 1995 to 1999, a group of European organizations from various countries joined in a network called, On-Line/More Diversity in the Media (originally On-Air/More Colour) to establish media training and employment projects targeting minority communities. These countries included the Netherlands (STOA), the UK (Borough



of Hammersmith and Fulham and LFVDA), Greece (Dimitra), and Sweden (Sveriges Radio and Sveriges Television).

The network focused on training minorities to increase job skills and employability, mediation on the job market to help facilitate the entry of professionals in the media industry, and/or providing management counseling and training seminars for media workers and employers. The initiative has worked to influence and raise awareness of broadcasters' recruitment policies. These projects resulted in the training and employment many members of minority groups in the audiovisual industry.¹³

End Notes

¹ For a detailed examination and comparison of the multicultural policies and practices in the United States, the United Kingdom, New Zealand and Australia, please see H. May, *Broadcast in Colour: Cultural Diversity and Television Programming in Four Countries* (2002). The study focuses on dramatic productions.

² H. May (2002), p. 18.

³ NAACP, “Out of Focus, Out of Sync” (2001).

⁴ See <http://www.paulhastings.com/ClientAlerts/Content/04-03%20FCC%20Equal%20Employment%20Rules.htm>.

⁵ Cited from Canoe.ca, Tuesday, Oct. 14th. “Broadcast networks lauded for diversity.” http://jam.canoe.ca/Television/oct14_networks-ap.html.

⁶ Initiative was supported by Secretary of State for Culture, Media and Sport, Chris Smith. Its membership comprises: Carlton television, the IT The membership includes: Carlton Television, the ITV Network Centre, the BBC, Channel 4, BSkyB, Channel 5, GMTV, United News and Media, the Granada Media Group, Pearson television, ITN, PACT, Women in Film and television, the Independent Television Commission, the Royal Television Commission, the Royal Television Society, BAFTA, the Film Council and the Broadcasting Standards Commission.

⁷ “Minority Ethnic Groups in the UK,” December 12, 2002. Published on National Statistics website: <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/meg1202.pdf>.

⁸ Criticism from Britain’s largest broadcasting film and theater union - Bectu. *Guardian Unlimited* August 25, 2003.

⁹ Cited from *Guardian Unlimited*, May 13, 2002, a black female journalist who has freelanced for the BBC for more than three years.

¹⁰ *Top Ten TV* (2001), p. 57.

¹¹ Communications Law Centre (CLC) prepared its report for the Media Entertainment and Arts Alliance (MEAA, formerly known as Actors Equity) into the representation of non-English speaking people in Australian television drama. H. May (2002), p.50. Marion Jacka’s study (2002) found 26% of actors in commercial television were non-Anglo-Saxon p.v.

¹² *Trends in Multicultural Australia: Implications for Australian Content* G. Abbott, Paper presented at the Australian Broadcasting Authority’s Conference Radio television and the New Media held in Canberra 3-4 May 2001.

¹³ For more details of the results of this project see *Tuning into Diversity Project* (2002), p. 229-233.