

# **Cultural Diversity on Television**

## **Phase IV Research – Focus Groups**

December 2003

## Table of Contents

<b>I.</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION.....</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>II.</b>	<b>METHODOLOGY.....</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>III.</b>	<b>EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>IV.</b>	<b>ANALYSIS .....</b>	<b>7</b>
	<b>A. The Role of Television .....</b>	<b>7</b>
	i. In the Lives of New Canadians and Successive Generations .....	7
	ii. The Influence in Shaping Social Attitudes .....	9
	<b>B. Presence of Cultural Diversity on Canadian Television .....</b>	<b>12</b>
	i. Overall Perceptions of Diversity .....	12
	ii. Representation: Faces on Television.....	16
	<b>C. Portrayal of Specific Cultural Groups on Canadian Television.....</b>	<b>18</b>
	i. Perceived Stereotypes .....	20
	ii. Coverage in the News .....	25
	iii. Towards a Fair and Accurate Portrayal of Cultural Diversity.....	28
	<b>D. Importance of Cultural Diversity on Television.....</b>	<b>31</b>
	i. Importance of Representation .....	31
	ii. Importance of Fair and Accurate Portrayal.....	33
	<b>E. Cultural Diversity on Television in Canada versus the US .....</b>	<b>35</b>
	<b>F. Perceptions of Change in the Representation and Portrayal of Diversity.....</b>	<b>37</b>
	<b>G. Perceived Obstacles to Fair and Accurate Portrayal.....</b>	<b>38</b>
	<b>APPENDIX A – MEDIA HABITS .....</b>	<b>42</b>
	<b>APPENDIX B – FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION GUIDE.....</b>	<b>49</b>

## I. Introduction

Solutions Research Group Consultants Inc. (SRG) is pleased to present to **The Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television** the results of Phase IV 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 consists of a series of 20 focus groups conducted among Canadians of diverse ethnocultural and racial backgrounds and among Aboriginal Peoples in selected cities across Canada.

The main purpose of Phase IV was to explore the *perceptions* of the current state of on-screen presence and portrayal of ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples on Canadian television. Specific topics of investigation included:

- The role played by television in the lives of Canadians from various ethnocultural and racial backgrounds;
- Perceptions of the current state of cultural diversity on Canadian television;
- Views on the portrayal of ethno-cultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples on television;
- The impact of inadequate and inaccurate representation and portrayal; and
- Suggestions for ways to improve the status quo.

This document is a summary of Phase IV findings. 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. Methodology

A total of 20 focus groups were conducted over a two-week period from May 13-28, 2003 in six selected markets across Canada.

The specifications for these groups were determined through consultation between SRG and members of *The Task Force for Cultural Diversity on Television* (Task Force) and included the following considerations:

- Adequate representation of major cultural and visible minority groups in Canada;
- Representation of major markets – in particular, those markets with high proportions of ethnocultural and racial diversity; and
- Sufficient representation of sub-group differences relating to age, gender and immigrant status (i.e. Canadian-born vs. new Canadians).

All participants were between the ages of 18-54 and were drawn from a variety of occupations and socio-economic strata. Of the 20 focus groups, 15 were conducted in English and five were conducted in French (i.e. Montreal and Quebec City groups).

## **Group Composition and Characteristics by Market**

In total, approximately 150 participants from a variety of backgrounds participated in these groups. The composition of these groups was as follows:

### **Vancouver, May 13-14**

- Group 1 – East/Southeast Asian backgrounds (Vietnamese, Filipino, Japanese)
- Group 2 – Chinese backgrounds (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan)
- Group 3 – Aboriginal Peoples
- Group 4 – South Asian backgrounds (Punjabi speakers, males only)

### **Toronto, May 20-22**

- Group 1 – Chinese backgrounds (Mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan)
- Group 2 – Black, African backgrounds
- Group 3 – Hispanic backgrounds
- Group 4 – Middle Eastern, South Asian, backgrounds (females only)
- Group 5 – Black, Caribbean backgrounds
- Group 6 – South Asian backgrounds (Hindi speakers, females only)
- Group 7 – Middle Eastern, South Asian backgrounds (males only)

### **Winnipeg, May 21**

- Group 1 – Aboriginal Peoples (males only)
- Group 2 – Aboriginal Peoples (females only)

### **Montreal, May 26-27**

- Group 1 – Chinese/Southeast Asian backgrounds
- Group 2 – Black, African/Caribbean backgrounds
- Group 3 – Middle Eastern/North African backgrounds
- Group 4 – New Canadians, mix of Hispanic and South Asian backgrounds

### **Halifax, May 26**

- Group 1 – Black Canadians
- Group 2 – New Canadians, mix of South Asian, Hispanic, Middle Eastern backgrounds

### **Quebec City, May 28**

- Group 1 – Aboriginal Peoples

### III. Executive Summary

*“I think it [the most influential medium] is television. Young children are watching TV, teenagers are watching, adults are watching... It’s in your face.”*

- This research program among Canadians of diverse ethnocultural and racial and Aboriginal backgrounds confirms the central role television plays in our lives. Overwhelmingly, in 20 focus groups conducted across Canada, television was perceived to be the most influential of all media in terms of shaping and influencing social attitudes.
- Television has become a global shared experience. Its ubiquitous presence coupled with the perception that most people watch at least some television every day gives the medium the role of serving as a universal meeting ground – a global link.
- Aside from its entertainment function, television plays a critical socio-cultural role as successive generations of Canadians from diverse backgrounds participate in the Canadian cultural mosaic, and it is a first window to Canada for new immigrants.

#### **Perceptions of Current Presence and Portrayal of Diversity on Television**

- There was virtually unanimous agreement that there is far greater diversity of cultures and ethnicities present in Canada than is currently seen on Canadian television. Most participants in these groups reported that they see cultural diversity represented primarily on Canadian news programming and on culturally-specific or multicultural channels. There is a strong desire among all minority groups for increased representation.
- Many were under the impression that there is somewhat more diversity in the local news programming in major markets such as Toronto and Vancouver where the population itself is more diverse. Some in Quebec perceived a somewhat greater degree of representation of diversity on English-language TV than on its French-language counterpart.
- Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples were most commonly identified as being severely underrepresented on Canadian television, not only in focus groups consisting of Aboriginal men and women, but also by other minority respondents.
- Canadians of Asian backgrounds were also perceived to be missing from Canadian television screens. Many respondents wondered why they did not see

more people with Asian backgrounds on television, given that they represent Canada's largest visible minority population.

- Canadians of Hispanic and Middle Eastern backgrounds also noted only sporadic representation from their ethnocultural and racial communities. Only Blacks were seen as well represented, and that largely via American programming.
- Across all groups, respondents noted that even when their own ethnocultural or racial groups are represented on mainstream television, the quality of that representation is often inaccurate or subject to stereotypes. As a result, many felt television plays a significant role in perpetuating these stereotypes.
- While there were perceptions of a gap between Canada's diverse reality versus its reflection on television, the consensus across all groups was that the representation of diversity on Canadian television has improved over the last five to ten years. On the whole, respondents felt that there has been positive momentum. Many also expressed faith that the representation of diversity will continue to increase in future generations.
- Although most respondents agreed there has been an improvement in the representation of diversity in the on-air staff of Canadian newscasts, several portrayal issues were identified relating to the coverage and treatment of news items. It was generally felt that while the facts of most news items are usually accurate, the manner in which people from ethnocultural or racial minorities are depicted in the narrative and/or images is often unbalanced.

### **Importance of Diversity on Television**

- Canadians from diverse ethnocultural and racial backgrounds unanimously agree that it is essential to have Canada's diversity reflected on television screens.
- Quality representation is a matter of self-esteem, validation, a sense of belonging and a sense of community. Many participants report that it makes them feel good to see cultural diversity in significant roles on television, giving them a vicarious sense of accomplishment. Some related that the absence of representation leads to a feeling of insignificance and invisibility.
- Many participants in these groups felt strongly that a fair and accurate portrayal of their own ethnocultural or racial backgrounds could lead to positive change in society as a whole. Fair and accurate representations were seen to have the potential to enlighten the population, and promote acceptance and understanding. Conversely, inaccurate or unfair portrayals were seen to reinforce existing stereotypes and promote tensions.

## **Towards Fair and Accurate Representation**

- Participants in these groups expressed a desire for balance – they didn't expect to erase all stereotypical and negative representations, but to have them counterbalanced by other positive and accurate portrayals. In this way, they felt that mainstream viewers would see ethnocultural and racial minorities as “more human.”
- Certain characteristics and attributes emerged as being desirable across virtually all groups interviewed – in particular, most wanted to be portrayed exactly they are in real life – *hardworking, empowered, and successful*. Other desirable characteristics differed somewhat by group, but often included *family-oriented and educated*.
- There was no consensus on what constitutes accurate portrayal – respondents were interested in seeing varying levels of cultural reference in their portrayal on television, often in relation to the extent in which they personally feel integrated into mainstream Canada. For some, a fair and accurate portrayal of diversity would translate into a sort of “colour-blindness” that would present ethnocultural and racial minorities in much the same way as non-minorities are featured, with little or no emphasis on cultural identity. For others, the optimal portrayal was just the opposite – they would like to see more cultural cues in the portrayals of characters and personalities belonging to their ethnocultural or racial community.
- The business case for diversity links to audience loyalty – several respondents reported that diversity in television programming, or the lack of it, has a direct influence in determining which programs they choose to watch. Others reported that they tend to feel most engaged in a program when they can identify with a character or personality who shares a similar background, whether cultural or otherwise.



#### **IV. Analysis**

##### **A. The Role of Television**

###### **i. In the Lives of New Canadians and Successive Generations**

In order to explore issues relating to the presence and portrayal of cultural diversity in Canadian television, it is important to begin with a clear understanding of the unique position television occupies in the lives of people from Canada's racial and ethnocultural communities.<sup>1</sup>

Aside from a pure entertainment function, television provides an important first window to Canada for new immigrants and continues to play a critical role as future generations integrate and participate in Canadian culture.

Most attributed at least some of television's power to its combination of sight and sound, a dynamic with particular relevance for new immigrants who rely more on visual communication until they become fluent in English and/or French.

Many new Canadians shared their experiences first arriving in Canada when television served as a language tutor and cultural guide. Mainstream programming provided a means to learn about social norms and practices. As such, the medium occupied an important place not only in the development of first impressions, but also attitudes.

*"I used to watch a lot of TV since I came to Canada. It helped me improve my vocabulary."  
(Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*"Another thing that's very important to me, I watch TV so I can improve my English. To learn the typical English language." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"When I first moved here, I used it to help me learn English. When I first heard English on TV, it was totally different from what I learned in Japan." (Vancouver, East Asian background)*

*"I watch TV more compared to when I [first] came to Canada. You come here, you should know everything happening here and the quickest way is to watch TV. It helps me to know the culture here and the personalities." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"Another thing that's very important to me, I watch TV so I can improve my English. To learn the typical English language." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

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<sup>1</sup> Each of these groups started with a discussion of the role of media in general within participants' lives. The details of these contextual discussions are provided in Appendix A: Media Habits.

Interestingly, this role is often reversed in the next generation, which sees ethnic television as a means to retain their heritage. Several parents mentioned using the multicultural programming available on television, including that offered on digital services, as a way of re-introducing their cultural identity and language to second and third generations.

*"[Watching] more. We have Spanish TV on between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., CNN Espanola or Spanish soap operas. And we have a two year old and we want him to learn Spanish—he's with an English babysitter all day—so he listens." (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*"...even when I was young I rebelled against my parents, they tried to make me watch ART." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"The Arabic channel on digital...it's on constantly. My mother's addicted. It's forced upon me – it's the only culture I get. But it's so Americanized." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"For my son, it helps him learn Spanish. For me, I use it more for news." (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*"I want my son to watch Telelatino cause I want him to learn Spanish. His mother's Native and I want him to learn about that so I let him watch APTN." (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

Many identified a need to seek additional perspectives on news events and relied on the international news broadcasts aired on ethnic services to act as a counterbalance to viewpoints offered on Canadian and American newscasts.

The events surrounding the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 offered a particular case in point. When events like this occur, minority respondents said they, like the rest of the population, turn to television. But unlike the general population their ability in many cases to speak a second or third language gives them access to perspectives from international news sources not easily accessible by the mainstream. For many, this has heightened their awareness of what they see as bias in certain news programs – particularly in American news broadcasts. As might be expected in relation to recent events, this viewpoint was especially common among, but not exclusive to, respondents with Middle Eastern backgrounds.

*"I stopped watching CNN after 9/11 – it became very anti-Islam. It's the way they caption, the words are strong against the Middle Eastern backgrounds. Religion is not terrorism." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"Before I used to watch soap operas, talk shows, or movies, but as so many different things have happened in our world I've started watching the news channel and I used to never watch the news." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"BBC Newsworld [is] widely held to do a great job of covering international news – comes closest to presenting a truly world view of the news." (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group Immigrants)*

*“Right now, I’m more dependent on the television to inform me on what’s going on around the world. And I try to watch all different kinds of news channels, from CBC to CNN and even the Middle Eastern background news channels just because sometimes you’re not gonna agree*

*with what they say and it’s really interesting to get different perspectives on what’s going on.”*  
(Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)

*“I watch more news programs than I used to.”* (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)

*“If you watch CNN or something, it’s always the same perspective. You watch CBC, you got a whole different perspective.”* (Vancouver, Chinese background)

*“My parents watch their own Japanese channel, but they also watch English TV to find out what else is going on.”* (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)

*“By being connected to what’s going on in our own country, we can help them understand the truth...Westerners only see the bad things – that’s all the channels present.”* (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)

*“For me it’s simple, I like all that is news: TVA, TQS, RDI, LCN. Then I compare with TV5 and I go to the American stations to get their view.”* (Quebec, Aboriginal background)

*“Right now I’m more dependent upon TV to inform me about what’s going on around the world...Middle Eastern background, CNN, BBC – I pick and choose from different perspectives.”* (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)

## **ii. The Influence in Shaping Social Attitudes**

Television was overwhelmingly perceived to be the most influential of all media in shaping social attitudes. Internet and newspapers were influential among certain demographics, but rarely to the same extent as television. Several respondents believed that the Internet will become increasingly influential as the next generation demonstrates a more proactive approach to media use, but felt that television will continue to play a central role in both shaping and reflecting social attitudes.

One of the reasons respondents cited for its influence is that television has become a globally shared experience. Its ubiquitous presence in Canada and around the world coupled with the perception that most people watch at least some television every day gives the medium the role of serving as a universal meeting ground. With the advent of satellite TV in recent years, international channels and programming from all over the world have become readily accessible, further extending the application of television as a global link.

*“Practically all of us have a TV in our room. If I walk into my Grandpa’s room, he’s watching Cantonese TV. If I walk into my sister’s room, it’d be sitcoms. I watch movies on DVD.”*  
(Vancouver, Chinese background)

*“Television, because having a TV in your house is a norm.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“Not every household has the Internet, but almost everyone has a TV.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“I don’t have a computer, so I don’t go on the Internet. As for newspapers, some people may not want to read, or know how to read, but everyone can watch and wants to watch TV.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“My mother called me from India and asked me about SARS and if the whole city was dying.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“I think it [the most influential medium] is the TV. Young children are watching the TV, teenagers are watching the TV, adults are watching. It’s in your face.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“You can get to every generation through the TV.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

Many respondents credited the power of television to its ability to provide both auditory and visual sensory inputs. Quite apart from its natural appeal to recent immigrants still learning English and/or French, the visual aspect of television was seen as particularly influential with regard to news coverage – seeing events unfold on screen seems to bring them that much more to life.

*“TV is visual. You can hear about the war in Iraq, but to actually see it means a lot more.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“TV is a very strong way to communicate – you can explain a lot with a picture.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“People who don’t know how to read can understand something on TV.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean backgrounds)*

*“Audio-visual is always more influential than just hearing alone.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“A picture is worth a thousand words. It’s a moving picture.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“Even if you don’t understand the words, you can pick out the movements, the action.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

While other media such as newspapers and the Internet were seen as active experiences that require effort on the part of the user, TV is passive, allowing its viewers to simply absorb information. However, many also noted that ease of viewing often translates into an uncritical acceptance of what is shown – some went so far as to imply that viewers are at the mercy of their television sets with no control over what they are watching and are therefore highly vulnerable to its influence.

*“TV [is influential] because you don’t have a choice. For the Internet, you choose. If you’re watching TV and it’s the news, you don’t have a choice, they just show you...” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“You have to buy the newspaper to read what’s going on and most people are too lazy to do this, and the TV is just sitting there.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“When you’re watching TV, you don’t do anything else. When you listen to the radio, you’re driving, writing...With TV, it’s all you do and you swallow the information... you don’t read, you don’t do anything.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“There’s not a lot of effort you have to put in. You don’t have to read, you just have it on and listen to it.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“On TV you see what they show you. On the Internet you can find out whatever you want.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“You’re more vulnerable when you’re watching TV.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

Television was perceived to have the ability to instill and perpetuate attitudes and actions in its viewers. The images it projects were often seen to be an imitation of life or a reflection of society, thereby helping to shape societal norms, influence public opinion, and affect behaviour. When the images or content are negative, respondents expressed concern, not just about the story itself, but about the effect these images would have on their lives and the lives of people around them.

*“In the news, people believe everything they see. A prime example, there was some cuts to social services, so instead of maybe showing the minister’s office or something like that, the camera, here in Vancouver with Global television, pans the downtown east side and the people they [showed] were Aboriginal people. You don’t see any other [group]. That makes people form opinions.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“I think we live in a society that is very much based on visualization, and I think that’s how people get their perceptions. You see these billboards with really thin women and I think that may be something people want to imitate.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“People can imitate what’s on television and they think that’s the way they should behave. They see it on television so they assume that’s okay.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“TV is visual. You see what the trends are and you see people in different roles – it affects people’s perceptions.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“If you’re watching the news you tend to believe whatever the person is saying, and you develop an image in your mind and pass the attitude along to your children.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“We tend to act out what we see. You get that with connection with TV, you want to be there, you want to be a part of it. You can’t get that with the newspaper or radio.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

As a result, some participants said they find themselves constantly monitoring what they or their children are watching. For parents, their children are growing up watching television – they are the target audience of entire channels and the focus of marketers. As a result, many parents find themselves in the position of having to debrief their children about what they might have seen on television and to help them to understand which messages are true or false and what behaviour is appropriate or inappropriate.

*“Kids, all they do is watch TV, and they are more easily influenced.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“I don’t feel that TV would influence my home, but I think television has a big role for most families. As a social worker I see children watching TV all day long and not necessarily educational programs.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“If my son sees something inappropriate on TV, we talk about it, especially if it really isn’t true.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“My daughter started to dress like the people on BET, started to sing and talk like them...it was a real problem.” (Toronto, Black Caribbean background)*

*“Especially when you’re younger you’re influenced by advertising—what’s cool, what you’re supposed to wear and what you’re supposed to look like.” (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

## **B. Presence of Cultural Diversity on Canadian Television**

### **i. Overall Perceptions of Diversity**

As a starting point to help understand perceptions about the current state of diversity on Canadian television, participants in all groups were asked the extent to which they felt the cultural diversity shown on television reflects the reality of diversity in Canada today.

It is important to note that, in response to this question, many minority respondents in English-speaking Canada had difficulty identifying Canadian-produced programs. The popularity and profile of American programs aired on Canadian television made it difficult for many to answer this question. This was not as pronounced in Quebec where Canadian-produced programming in French clearly enjoys a more prominent profile.

*“Most of the shows are coming out of the States anyways.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“It’s very hard for a newcomer to distinguish between American and Canadian television...it seems like there are very few channels that Canada has on their own.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“A lot of our, or at least my, viewing is American channels and they always have one or two Chinese background people, or Korean, or however they want to portray them, but not as many Indians.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“What do we have that’s 100% Canadian? CBC and the French channel, and how many shows do you watch on CBC besides hockey and news?” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“It’s all American and in America it’s either white or Black.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Mostly what we watch is American. We don’t produce enough shows for Canadians to watch.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

There was virtually unanimous agreement that there is a far greater diversity of cultures and ethnicities living in Canada than is currently seen on television. Most participants said they only see cultural diversity represented on Canadian news programming, and on culturally-specific or multicultural channels. Certain local newscasts, and national newscasts such as those seen on CTV, CBC or Global, were considered to display more cultural diversity than other types of programming, both in terms of on-air talent and news items.

*“Other than the news, there is nothing else. It’s just news or multicultural channels. For the Indian community, we’re either in the news or we’re on the multicultural channel.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“Another thing I’ve noticed is that the Indo-Canadian, or the multiculturalism, is segregated. You have your [Aboriginal] channel, you have a few Indo-Canadian people in the media...you still don’t have Indo-Canadians or other visible ethnic minorities in mainstream television.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“You can get so much different programming on cable, but I don’t think I’ve seen that much diversity in the mainstream media.” (Toronto, Black Caribbean)*

*“Newscasters are all over the map.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Ian Hanomansing—he’s great. Harold Hussein, Ben Chin, there’s a few others.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I see that CityTV is the most obvious of all of them. You have a good representation of women of colour, and you even have people in wheelchairs. They’re a pioneer in having diversity.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“CBC now has Asians and Indians. This has been in the last three or four years, but I think CityTV were the first ones.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“Locally, if we’re looking at the news, I can see the different cultures.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

Many of the respondents believed that there is more diversity in the local news programming in major markets such as Toronto and Vancouver where there are more visible minorities.

*“CBC has to represent for all of Canada and this amount of diversification only exists in Toronto. They can’t saturate you with [multiculturalism] like CityTV does.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“The Toronto experience is a different thing. I don’t think the same multicultural diversity happens across Canada.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

The comments were quite different in French-speaking Quebec than in English-speaking Canada. Many respondents in the Quebec groups felt that French programming in Quebec was less diverse than was English-language Canadian programming. Many respondents recognized this as part of a greater issue involving the protection of French language and culture. Others considered it to be an issue of volume – they think there is more diversity in English-language programming simply because there is more programming available.

*“I think the approach is different compared to what the Americans do. When an immigrant arrives in the US, he brings his diversity, while when someone arrives in Quebec, he has to integrate and learn French – you can redo your life, but in our way. In Quebec, we have to work to be accepted.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“When I came to Canada I only spoke Chinese background and we were made to feel that we had to learn the language. It’s as if we’re pushed into the culture. I’m very happy I learned French, but I would have liked to have had a choice. It’s not like I should have to learn it because I live here. In the States it’s different. Here it’s French first.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“It seems to me that in Ontario, I see more communities represented.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“This ethnic and cultural diversity is less represented in French language programming compared to the rest of Canada, and the English Canadian shows are even less [diversified] than the ones produced in the US.” (Montreal, East/Southeast Asian background)*

*“It’s because of the politics – English and French – but it’s a question of protectionism, not racism.” (Montreal, East/Southeast Asian background)*

On the whole, participants report seeing predominantly white and black faces in the shows and programs that they watch on mainstream television, while other groups, in particular Aboriginal Peoples and Asians, were considered to be largely absent.

*“People on TV all look the same. Out on the street, you see all different cultures.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“You walk down Yonge Street, or driving around, you see so many different nationalities but the same thing isn’t accurately represented in the media.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*



*“There’s not enough representation out there based on the amount of different cultures there are.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“We watch what’s dished out, but if everybody in Toronto had a vote, it may affect what we watch on TV. Right now there’s not a very good representation of the demographics here.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“There’s the token Chinese background, token Black guy, but so far there’s the same formula as the Americans but you can tell it’s a Canadian-style production. But in terms of the mix, I don’t think there’s any difference.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

A related, but distinct, issue is tied to cultural representation. Not only are white faces perceived to dominate Canadian television screens, but the mainstream culture associated with these faces is also considered to be ubiquitous, leaving many of the respondents in these groups to beg the question: if Canada is so proud of multiculturalism, why is only one component of the population represented on mainstream television?

*“What they’re showing on TV is not multicultural, it’s more general across the board, it’s for everybody. But on Saturdays and Sundays they do have more ethnic shows. But it’s very forced, maybe an hour, two hours on the weekend.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“Especially not for Pakistanis. The Indian community still gets a little bit of focus, but not us. They consider us as Indian. We speak Urdu, which is similar to Hindi, but our language or culture gets no focus over here.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

Some of the respondents, most commonly new Canadians, rationalized the lack of cultural diversity, suggesting that it is simply impractical to try and represent all of the groups that exist in Canada and even if it were possible, there would be not a large enough audience to support the programming. Others seemed to feel that true representation would not be palatable to the mainstream public – especially those living in more suburban or rural areas where there is little ethnocultural and racial diversity. Still, the majority of respondents felt strongly that there needs to be greater representation of Canada’s diversity on television.

*“I think it’s normal, if you go to Tunisia, you don’t see Quebecois on television.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“It’s not representative of how the population is made up. But on the other hand it seems to be what appeals to the audience, and you can’t fault them for catering to what the audience wants.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I think the problem with diversity in programming, if you look at the Asian or the Indian programs, they’re quite different, so if you put them on, you’re not likely going to get the mainstream audience.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“The [sitcoms and dramas] are targeted to a larger audience, so they’re not interested in small minority groups.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

## **ii. Representation: Faces on Television**

Across all groups, respondents tended to feel that their own culture or ethnicity is not sufficiently represented on mainstream Canadian television. The perceived degree of under-representation ranged from tolerable to unjust, depending on the group. Compounding the issue, when representation does occur, most feel it is ghettoized either to multicultural channels, to “odd hour” programming blocks or to news programming.

Canada’s Aboriginal Peoples were most commonly identified as being under-represented, not only in the focus groups consisting of Aboriginal Peoples, but also among other minority respondents. By way of example, in Aboriginal groups conducted in three markets across the country, respondents were hard-pressed to think of *any* examples of Aboriginals on television outside of Graham Greene, who hosts a series on an American specialty channel (TLC), and those who appear on the Aboriginal Peoples Television Network (APTN).

*“I think that aliens are probably more represented on TV than Aboriginal people.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“If you look at all the news programs in Vancouver, including CBC or Global, a lot of them are becoming more and more reflective culturally, but there is no Aboriginal person to look at working in the mainstream media.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“The Aboriginals...we didn’t even immigrate to this country, we were already here, and we’re not on TV. Okay, so now we’ve got APTN, but it’s on channel 73 out in TV nowhere.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

Asian Canadians were also perceived to be missing from Canadian television screens. Many respondents wondered why they didn’t see more Asians on television, given that they represent Canada’s largest visible minority population.

*“If I want to see a face like mine, I only get one channel.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“There are more Asian people [here] now but I don’t see that on TV.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Is there any Canadian program that has an Asian person?” (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

*“Even Asian would do just fine, not looking for Vietnamese in particular.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

Some Canadians of Chinese background suggested that this is due, at least in part, to traditional cultural and linguistic barriers that they saw as specific to their community.

*“I think Asian people don’t participate as much in newsmaking... I think a lot of it has to do with the language issue.” (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

*“It could also be that Asians don’t go into the media because those aren’t the traditional types of careers that Asians pursue.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I think Chinese background culture is a closed culture and we enjoy our own community of people. Sometimes, we just don’t care because we’re so comfortable within our own family group.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

As a point of comparison, most felt that the Black population is well represented on television in Canada, largely as a result of American programming. Especially in Toronto, Black Canadians generally felt there is adequate representation of Blacks on television, both on Black Entertainment Television (BET) and in more mainstream programming, particularly in sitcoms.

*“The Blacks have struggled a long time to get representation on television programs and they’ve been lamenting stereotypes but finally, they’re getting their message across and in their shows their relating the Black experience, the Black culture.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I find there’s more and more Black representation.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I lived in Winnipeg and Vancouver and it was kind of funny to see commercials with Blacks in them because there are virtually no Blacks in Winnipeg and Vancouver.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“They always appear as African-American. But African Africans are lacking.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

Members of the Black community in Halifax, however, offered a specific example in which they felt “invisible,” citing a tourism advertisement for Nova Scotia in which no Black faces were shown despite the community’s long history and significant presence in the province.

*“It’s like the Nova Scotia tourism commercial – there are no Black people in it so people don’t think that Black people live here. But in fact, we have the largest Black community per capita in North America and we’re the oldest Black community in Canada.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

Among those participants of Hispanic and Middle Eastern backgrounds, most noted only sporadic representation of their own ethnocultural and racial communities. Middle Eastern background Canadians only saw themselves in the news or on specialty channels. Hispanic background Canadians typically saw themselves represented on American shows and programs, but only occasionally on mainstream Canadian channels.

*“Even if sometimes on the Latino channel we have programs, they’re mostly for young people...apart from that, there’s nothing.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“On Sundays you don’t always see the church channels, you have Indian programs, Persian programs, Italian programs, Spanish programs.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“I think an hour here and an hour there is not the networks giving us [their time], but us demanding to be on TV.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

Perceptions of under-representation were sometimes exacerbated by what respondents saw as instances of selective representation. For example, some noted that only lighter-skinned, straight-haired Black people with certain features are shown on television, while those with darker-skin or stronger features are under-represented. Members of other ethnocultural and racial groups, such as Middle Eastern background or East/Southeast Asian background Canadians, felt that while there is a presence of “Arabs” or “Asians” in general on television, people from their own home countries or cultures do not receive representation.

*“What I see is that when they talk about an Arab they don’t say if he’s Moroccan or Algerian... That bothers me. They always say, “of an Arab origin,” because it’s faster but they don’t make any distinctions.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“When I see my culture, it’s Latin America and not specific for my country.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“I never see a dark-skinned person. There’s not a lot of diversity, but when you do get it, it’s the light skin with the curly hair.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

### **C. Portrayal of Specific Cultural Groups on Canadian Television**

Across all groups interviewed, respondents offered the criticism that even when their own ethnocultural or racial groups are represented on mainstream television, the quality of that representation is often inaccurate or subject to stereotypes. As a result, many felt that television plays a significant role in perpetuating stereotypes about ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples.

*“What little representation there is out there is being stereotypical of minorities.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“It’s all very stereotyped and subjective. Particularly when it comes to the Arabs and the Middle Eastern backgrounds, they portray the people from a negative point of view.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“I find there’s a lot of stereotyping that happens. I do see some representation but I don’t think it’s the right representation.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Right now, any Asian characters they have on TV are stereotypical or they’re completely assimilated into white culture. I don’t take any offense. I grew up in a white culture so I can relate to that kind of stuff, but when they show stereotypical Asian characters, I find that a little offensive.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Watching TV here I find that it doesn’t portray the essence of my culture. They just show what they think Latin American people are like.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

Stereotypical portrayals are those that depict all members of a ethnocultural or racial group as having the same attributes and characteristics. These traits are sometimes overtly negative or derogatory. In some cases, they can have a negative impact on the minority group being portrayed, even when the intent may be to present a positive or neutral picture.

*“A negative portrayal reflects the stereotypes that society has about Black people. The positive would be anything else.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“I hate to say it but the things that they’re mentioning [South Asians working in convenience stores or as cab drivers], damn it, they’re the best at what they’re doing.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

Particularly disturbing for many of the respondents was the display of ethnocultural or racial minorities for the purposes of comic relief. Often these types of portrayals derive humour by exaggerating commonly held perceptions of a person’s race or culture.

*“The Chinese background guy always talks with the same accent or has this certain job. It’s always the same joke.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Sure there’s representation of other cultures but it’s just to make fun of them.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“If they represent a minority on a TV show, it’s usually something funny, it’s a joke. But in the news, it’s something serious and true.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“I think it’s always programs that are supposed to be funny. It’s always turned into a joke, which irritates me a little bit.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“If [Asians are] made to stand out as comic characters, that pisses me off a little.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

Shallow or token portrayals were also seen as undesirable in that they create “cardboard cut-out” images. These types of portrayals often involve characters with few speaking lines and little in the way of character development. Shallow portrayals can contribute to a perceived lack of cultural representation as there is no depth of character or personality to which the viewer can relate.

*“I don’t want that to be that ‘token’ Aboriginal.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“All the shows are on a reserve or in a reserve type setting. There are no shows set in the city.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“They use cultures as props. It may mean nothing to most people, but it means something to others.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

Several respondents expressed the need for a greater reflection of intra-group ethnocultural and racial communities. Across most of the groups, it was felt that this range of portrayal should include varying degrees of integration into mainstream culture. For example, participants in the Aboriginal groups noted that nearly all dramas to date (e.g., *North of 60*, *Northern Exposure*) show poor natives living on the reserve rather than successful Aboriginals living in the city. There is perceived to be a huge gap in portrayal between “noble savages who had their land stolen by ‘White men’” and “hopeless drunks,” with no social or historical explanation of what happened in between, or examples of other contemporary Aboriginals.

Examples of inaccurate portrayals, based on misinformation or misrepresentation, were also noted among the groups. Respondents noted that they were especially sensitive to mistakes and inconsistencies because they pay particularly close attention when their own ethnocultural or racial community is being presented on screen. Often, these errors were seen to occur when cultures are “clumped together” (i.e., Asian as opposed to Chinese background or Japanese) or as a result of public misconceptions.

*“On Law and Order, this one character is portrayed as Hispanic background, but the actor is an Aboriginal man. The writers should have portrayed him as such.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“There was this one show where an Asian was playing an Aboriginal, and the reason was that the producer had said that the Asians looked more Aboriginal than the Aboriginals did.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“I look to see the portrayal of Aboriginals or how they’re represented, or even if the people look Aboriginal.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“You can tell from their accent if they’re Hispanic background or Spanish.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“They exaggerate the accent. Some people do talk with an accent, but not like that.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

### ***i. Perceived Stereotypes***

In each group, participants generated a list of perceived stereotypes that they see on television and in the media relating to people from their own ethnocultural or racial background.

#### **BLACK STEREOTYPES**

According to these groups, a common stereotype of Blacks on television comes from the characters and personalities shown in hip-hop videos. This stereotype includes ostentatious or materialistic attitudes, slang or foul language and overtly sexual behaviour and dress.

Black stereotypes were often identified as gender specific. Black women were seen via socioeconomic stereotypes: single mothers, poor living conditions and little education. Meanwhile, Black men were seen as being widely portrayed as criminals and as absent fathers.

Other noted stereotypes, specific to place of origin, include Africans as bush-dwellers wearing colourful, tribal clothing, and Jamaicans as lazy pot-smokers.

*“The bling bling, and the baggy pants, and the Jeeps with the rims and the tint, and the girls with the booty shorts. The big attitude.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“He’s always the drug dealer or petty thief. Or the gopher for the white guy.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“In jail and from the hood.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“The babies don’t have fathers.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“Talking slang.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“They’re always poor. With the exception of Cosby, I don’t see many characters that are well to do.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“Every Black person peddles drugs or plays basketball. All the women yell and throw their husbands’ things out the window. That’s what I see.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“If you’re a young Black man, you’re going to get into trouble with the police. You’re going to shoot someone or deal drugs.” (Toronto, Black Caribbean)*

*“Every Black person is Jamaican, and every Jamaican is bad.” (Toronto, Black, Caribbean background)*

*“And for Africans, they’ve all got this ridiculous accent and dress in florescent coloured clothes.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

### HISPANIC BACKGROUND STEREOTYPES

Hispanic background respondents felt that they are stereotypically portrayed as poor and uneducated and often typecast in low status roles such as maid, chauffeur, blue-collar worker or drug dealer.

Hispanic background women were seen to be stereotyped as very sexual, submissive, and bearing children at a young age. Meanwhile, they noted that Hispanic background men are often portrayed as macho, violent, delinquent, and promiscuous.

Other commonly noted stereotypes of Hispanic background people on television include “wetbacks” and “border-jumpers,” although this was generally seen as coming from American media.

*“The Latinos who are on TV are not representative of our community. They show them as young, violent hoodlums. We’re not all like that.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“Mexicans are violent, cold killers...Columbians are drug lords.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“The men are macho and violent and the women are submissive.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“We’re always the maids and immigrants... they’re names being Rosa or Maria, Pedro or Jose.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“I think that representation that they have here of Latin American people doesn’t fit with reality because it’s the image they have of the immigrant. And they all have simple jobs and they’re looking for trouble.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“Since I’ve been working here, they always think of Mexicans as wetbacks, trying to jump the border. If you’re educated, and you come here, people will still think that you’re uneducated. They’re the ignorant ones.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“What they show about my country is the poverty and how everybody is uneducated. We’re not made for main roles.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“The girls are always sexy and they always say yes – it’s marketing to sell countries... you don’t say, ‘come visit me, I sell coffee.’” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“Very strong accent. A lot of Rs...and with women, sometimes they can’t pronounce the W.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

### MIDDLE EASTERN BACKGROUND STEREOTYPES

Respondents of Middle-Eastern/Arab backgrounds felt that the media stereotypes of their backgrounds were extremely derogatory. Many noted that “Middle Eastern” and “Muslim” were often used synonymously in the media.

People from Middle Eastern backgrounds were frequently seen to be stereotyped as terrorists, fundamentalists and fanatics – in the words of one respondent, “Bin Ladens.” The men were seen to be depicted as violent, aggressive, dishonest, and narrow-minded, while it was noted that women were widely portrayed as submissive, beaten, illiterate, and often as victims who are forced to wear veils and whose only role is to look after their husbands and children.

*“Irrational, backwards, extremist, violent.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“Terrorists.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“Ride camels.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

*“The men all have beards. Women wear veils and are submissive and beaten, and has tons of children.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“Religious fanatics. Crazy people.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*



*“We’re all Bin Ladens.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“The women are illiterate and ignorant. They’re baby- making machines.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“If they show a gambling scene, they have an Arab sitting there in his robe, spending money and not speaking English, but Arabic.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“The pizza guy. The taxi driver. The shop keeper.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Somebody with no education who’s new to the country and striving to make a buck.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Having an accent and very dumb.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“The women are not educated, they know nothing about the world and they’re just doing what their husband is saying.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

#### ABORIGINAL PEOPLES STEREOTYPES

According to the members of the Aboriginal communities interviewed, the most pervasive stereotype of Aboriginal Peoples is of the drunken, impoverished, and illiterate “natives” who are either living on the street of major urban centers or living on reservations.

One example that came up unprompted in both Winnipeg groups was that of a “Navajo Indian” a secondary character shown in a Chevy truck commercial. Though his appearance in the commercial was brief – only a couple of seconds – the message was clear to the Aboriginal men in the focus groups. Namely, here was another Aboriginal person who lives in the sticks and drives a beat-up Chevy pickup truck while hip, young white urbanites and suburbanites drive shiny, new Chevy trucks.

*“Indians falling down on North Main Street.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“When I watch shows and they show people littering, they show Indians cleaning it up.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“There go those damn Indians again. They don’t pay taxes.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“Lazy, drunken bums.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“We get our education handed to us. Look at all the stereotypes they’ve put on us. If they can take the time to criticize us, you’d think that they’d take the time to look into the reasons, but they don’t.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“Well, it used to be cowboys and Indians. The Indians were always the bad people. It’s not like that anymore.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Most of what you see on TV are Indians on the reservation and not living and working in the city.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“My wife is not Aboriginal, but as she’s learned more about the culture, she’s been paying more attention to what’s shown on TV. She noticed this one commercial with this old Native man in the desert with an old rickety truck and then it cuts to a young white woman with a new truck in the city. It’s a subliminal cultural stereotype.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Whenever you see an Aboriginal on a drama, they have to portray him as an Aboriginal, he can’t just be an ordinary guy.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“They’re taught how to look at [Aboriginals]. They learn that the white man came and took over the land and now the Aboriginals are drunk on reservations. There’s two hundred years missing.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“All the shows are on a reserve or in a reserve type setting. There are no shows set in the city.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

#### CHINESE BACKGROUND/ EAST/ SOUTHEAST ASIAN BACKGROUND STEREOTYPES

From across the country, Canadians of Chinese or East/Southeast Asian backgrounds reported seeing a wide range of stereotypes on television.

They noted several common stereotypes including:

- Gang members, martial artists, convenience store owners or restaurant workers;
- Extremely intelligent and industrious, excelling in technology or mathematics;
- Yelling or speaking with a thick accent; and
- Gender-specific stereotypes, such as dainty, elegant, sexualized women and men who are martial arts teachers or wise, old sages.

*“Convenience store owner.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“When you see a Chinese background, he’s the cook or he washes the dishes. He’s in a restaurant and that’s it.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“The professionals are bananas—yellow on the outside, white on the inside.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“The Kung Fu guys.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Cops or mafia. It’s the two polars and never in between. Never any ordinary guys, never any blue collar.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“They’re usually very elegant and very feminine. Very refined and that kind of thing, which isn’t true about a lot Asian women.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“The older [men] have this ancient Chinese background secret thing and the younger ones have Kung Fu.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

### SOUTH ASIAN BACKGROUND STEREOTYPES

The most commonly identified stereotype of South Asian people is reminiscent of the Apu character on *The Simpsons* – an immigrant with a thick accent who works in a convenience store.

South Asians were seen to be depicted as strict parents who insist upon arranged marriages and educational excellence, as women oppressed and not allowed to hold jobs, as men who are tough or aggressive.

South Asians also identified examples of cultural stereotyping – including an emphasis of the “Paki-dot,” strange and bad-smelling foods, and a disinterest in their own daughters.

*“They always say that Indian parents are strict, that Indian people are smart.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“They always try to show Indians as poor beggars and street people.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“People say the food smells bad. People ask me if we eat monkeys.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“Paki-dots.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“They always think Indian women obey their husbands.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“Arranged marriages. Dowries.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“We don’t want our daughters.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“If they see women as being oppressed, they might see men as being sexist and dominant.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“In the movies [the men are] beggars, taxi drivers, shoe shiners. Women are mothers.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“Mean, stern, tough...Bad guys and goons.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“7-11 attendants.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“The Indo-Canadian community, they’ve taken a lot of blows. We’re all gangsters, we’re all terrorists, we’re all drug dealers. The news portrays it that way.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

### **ii. Coverage in the News**

Although most respondents perceived that there has been an improvement in the representation of diversity in the on-air staff on Canadian newscasts, several portrayal issues were identified relating to the coverage and treatment of news items. It was generally felt that while the facts of any given news item are usually accurate, the manner in which people from ethnocultural or racial minorities are depicted within the narrative and/or images is often unbalanced.

*“It’s so subtle what [the news] does. They’re not coming out and saying it, but they’re planting the image in people’s minds that there are all of these problems with [Natives].” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

Many of these issues are typically amplified after a major incident involving people of specific ethnocultural or racial backgrounds and Aboriginal Peoples. Among some minorities, these occasions have promoted distrust of the mainstream media. For example, following the September 11 attacks, many respondents of Middle Eastern and South Asian backgrounds reported looking to alternative news sources for balanced and unbiased reporting.

*“But where do you get the news? Who can you trust? They all exaggerate a little bit.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Fox and CNN are so biased though.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“The BBC is very neutral, but CNN is very biased – especially when they talk about our part of the world. It’s not a true picture. They should give both sides, different views. It’s very pro-Western.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“In Quebec, specifically, they try to give points of view that encompass everything. The reporters that go to Iraq, Jerusalem, Algiers, they present everything and we can make up our own minds. In the States, the news is filtered.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

Some seek out newscasters with ethnocultural or racial backgrounds similar to their own, believing that these individuals would be less likely to report the news in a biased or inflammatory manner. Black Canadians also remarked that their distrust of the media is constantly reinforced by what they identified as negative or biased news coverage.

*“They always report negatively on Black people in the news.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“At home I used to get information. Here, they dis-inform me. I don’t believe the things I see in the news. You have to see who’s behind all of this. Everything is in the hands of one group. That’s why the information is all the same.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“The people who inform and the people who receive the information are all victims of an international system. The marketing is important, instead of the news.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

Many respondents believed strongly that ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples are treated differently in the news than the mainstream white

population. They noted that, compared to coverage of other stories, news items involving ethnocultural and racial minorities often include reference to cultural identity (i.e., race, country of origin, religion) that are not a part of the story when minority groups are not involved. According to one participant in Halifax, the only time a person's race or address is identified in the news is when a visible minority is suspected of a crime.

*"Yeah, cause it's never 'a guy shot the police.' It's 'a Native shot the police.'"(Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*"Maybe it's because I'm Aboriginal so I notice it more, but it seems like in Canada Aboriginals are mentioned more than any other group. I compare it to COPS, where it's mostly African-Americans." (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*"If a white guy gets busted for drugs, they'll just give his name. If it's a Black guy, they'll say he's Black and they'll give you name and address." (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*"My mom didn't like where I was living on Brunswick Street and she sent me this clipping. It was like the 12 worst things that happened on Brunswick Street. Really, it's not a bad area but you only hear about the [bad] things." (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*"They report on the 'Black' situation." (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

Some respondents acknowledged that this is due, at least in part, to the very nature of news coverage – that the most troublesome, sensational, or negative events often tend to be seen as newsworthy. Nonetheless, the end result is that it often serves to propagate negative stereotypes and a sense of "otherness."

One example from the print media was cited in Winnipeg where respondents referred to a "10 Most Wanted" photo feature that runs in one of the local newspapers. The photo feature typically includes several pictures of Aboriginal persons. Though the Aboriginal respondents recognized this as a partial reflection of reality in Winnipeg, they also noted that it presents a distorted picture of Aboriginal people in general, the vast majority of whom are law-abiding citizens.

*"When they talk about Africa in the news, it's all about the bad things, they think that Africa is the most unfortunate continent, that it's poor." (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*"But if all the nationalities living here wanted to hear the good news about their country, there wouldn't be enough time." (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*"When they have news of my country, it's because something bad has happened." (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*"All the [news] channels present are the bad things." (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*"The problem with the news on TV is that they just give you a little clip. Nothing is longer than two minutes." (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

### **iii. Towards a Fair and Accurate Portrayal of Cultural Diversity**

Respondents in all groups were asked how they would like to be represented on television. In response, many expressed a desire for balance – they didn't expect to erase all stereotypical or negative representation, but to have it rounded out with other positive and accurate portrayals. In this way, mainstream viewers would see ethnocultural and racial minorities as “more human.”

*“The positive shows they're human. You have both good and bad in you. A bad portrayal doesn't show the balance. If you show only the good side, you create [another] problem.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“Relate the truth. Don't only show one side.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“Be more open-minded.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“A balance of reality.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“Showing you as a whole instead of showing you as somebody who's always hotheaded, ignorant.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“It'd be nice for it to become more the norm. You're either a good person or a bad person and your background doesn't come into it. I mean, you're [cultural] background will shape who you are, but it shouldn't factor into good or bad.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“I want to see the whole story, both sides. If there's bad, then let's see bad but there's always a good part of it, so let's see that as well.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

Quality portrayal is often related to positive portrayal. A number of respondents expressed the desire for more positive depictions that would include showing visible minority characters or personalities as heroes or protagonists.

*“You don't see very much [Middle Eastern background culture] and what you do see is very negative, all terrorism and bombing. They don't show how beautiful the country is or how well they treat their guests.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

Often, the traits that respondents wished to see emphasized were the opposite of what they identified as current stereotypes, reinforcing their aversion, and in some cases anger, at the nature of these stereotypes. For many, the solution simply involves showing the present day-to-day reality of ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples in Canada, in contrast to the old stereotypes.

*“If there was a little Latino in a soap opera or something... she could have a degree, maybe not get pregnant when she's 15.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“Regular parts that don't involve Kung Fu or computers, or doctors, lawyers. Just a regular guy that you like to watch.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“They always show us lazy as Mexicans. We’re a hard working people.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

Certain characteristics and attributes emerged as being desirable across virtually all minority groups interviewed – in particular, most wanted to be portrayed as *hardworking, empowered, and successful*. Other desirable characteristics differed somewhat between groups, but often included *family-oriented, educated, and cultured*. Some respondents noted that, in order to be allowed into Canada, new immigrants need to be highly educated, professional people. Yet, they felt they were rarely portrayed that way on Canadian television.

*“There are a lot more Spanish immigrants and definitely a lot more professionals coming into the country nowadays and even though that is such an important change, it is not portrayed on TV.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“We want to see positive, sophisticated business people, in suits... Black women as judges and lawyers.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“I want to see a program that incorporates Natives into the working world. They always show them in the bush or on a reserve. I want to see what these people have accomplished.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“You never see an Aboriginal lawyer...” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Don’t portray us as lower class all the time. There are successful people in every culture.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“They never show us as professionals. We have all kinds of jobs, but they never show that.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“You have Black women and men who are doctors, nurses, lawyer, engineers, architects, teachers, construction workers, anything.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“Educated, cultured, motivated.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“Hard working, law abiding, intelligent.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“Successful women.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Happy and independent.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Family. Loving fathers.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“I don’t want to see a very strong Middle Eastern background representation where they have to teach and preach religion. I’d rather see a fair, reasonable, and intellectual representation.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Strong family ties.” (Toronto, Black, Caribbean background)*

*“Urban. Sober.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

Depending on the degree to which identified with mainstream Canadian culture, and reflecting some large intra-group differences, respondents were interested in seeing varying levels of cultural reference in their portrayal on television. For some, a fair and accurate portrayal of today's multicultural Canada would translate into a sort of "colour-blindness" that would present ethnocultural and racial minorities in much the same way as non-minorities, with little or no emphasis on cultural identity. For others, the optimal portrayal was just the opposite – they would like to see more cultural cues in the portrayals of characters and personalities belonging to their own ethnocultural or racial minority.

*"I think it's important for all people to see Aboriginals portrayed positively as people. As far as portraying the culture, I really want to see the traditions but also the importance of modern culture." (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*"Portray us like everybody else. Don't make distinctions." (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*"There are so many different kinds of Chinese background here in Canada. There are those like myself who were born and raised here and never been to China, and then there are those that are recent immigrants. Everyone has a different experience." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"Show that someone with an Asian background is more integrated into mainstream society than they are portrayed as." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"Some are more modern, some are more traditional, and you have to reflect that." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"I'd like to see more of the cultural traditions. Like when you go to someone's house, you have to greet them with the right words and they have to ask you if you've had dinner..." (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*"Show us like normal people." (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*"When you see the people on Friends, they're not talking about where they're from. Why do we have to talk about where we're from?" (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"I'd like to see us portrayed as how we fit into Canadian society rather than how we don't fit in." (Toronto, Black Caribbean)*

*"The blending of Indian and Canadian values." (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*"Portrayal of values. What's important to our culture." (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*"If they're watching kids shows...so they can see a Chinese background kid on the show that speaks English like all the other kids." (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

*"The same but also maintaining their cultural differences." (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*"We are like everyone else, but at the same time we have different values." (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*



Finally, it was widely felt that fair and accurate portrayals require increased presence in programs outside of news and information – especially in main or leading roles in dramatic and entertainment programming.

*“Not just history shows or documentaries. I’d like to see a sitcom with an Aboriginal person working alongside everyone else.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Why can’t they have any type of show, like Law and Order or whatever, that has Aboriginal people? It doesn’t always have to be on a reserve. Why can’t they just have a plain show?” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“If I see a Black person hosting a gala, I think this is very positive. I’ve seen this on English TV.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“They do a reality show following around the Osbournes... how about following around a real-life Aboriginal family... people like us, showing the successes, and the struggles, we go through.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“Why can’t one of the Friends be a Black guy or an Asian guy?” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“More leading roles.” (Toronto, South Asian background)*

*“There are a lot of Indian actors out there and they need to just get parts.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

## **D. Importance of Cultural Diversity on Television**

### **i. Importance of Representation**

Given their attitudes toward the power of television, this medium was identified by the groups as affecting its viewers both psychologically and behaviourally. The representation of ethnocultural and racial diversity on television was therefore considered to be extremely important, not only for themselves, but for other Canadians as well.

Several respondents reported that diversity in television programming, or the lack of it, has some influence in determining which programs they choose to watch. Others reported that they tend to pay more attention if they identify with a character or personality that they see on television – if they share the same background, whether cultural or otherwise.

*“I don’t notice that there isn’t a Native person on a show, I notice when there is.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“On TAG, Latinos are always young, violent hoodlums...I stopped watching TAG as a Latino man.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“I like to see movies when there’s Native actors doing Native roles.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“If you had an Aboriginal as a [newscaster], you’d have a lot more people watching just because he’s Native.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

This heightened awareness of representation can apparently have both positive and negative side effects. Many participants reported that it makes them feel good to see their own groups in significant roles on television, giving them a vicarious sense of pride and accomplishment. Others felt that it too often sets them up for disappointment, especially when the quality of representation is such that the person or character is portrayed in an undesirable light (i.e., shallow or negative).

*“When I used to watch Barney and Friends with my little cousins, we cheered whenever Mei Lyn was on.” (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

*“When I see some of the news from the States – like that sniper – I was so disappointed that a Black person was doing this...when your neighbour sees this kind of thing, he starts looking at you differently.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

On a personal level, inadequate or inaccurate representation often affects self-esteem. Some related that the absence of representation leads to a feeling of insignificance and invisibility, that they are somehow less deserving of the public’s share of mind. Many respondents – in particular, members of long-standing communities, such as Black Canadians in Halifax, Chinese background Canadians in Vancouver, Haitian Canadians in Montreal and many second- or third-generation Canadians – considered themselves sufficiently established to be entitled to representation, and felt shunned by its absence.

*“I’ve never sat down with my buddies and said, ‘Do you notice there aren’t a lot of Asians on TV? But I think it’s always running through the back of our minds.’” (Vancouver, East/Southeast Asian background)*

For some new Canadians, the lack of representation was interpreted to mean that they have not yet earned the right to be represented on television. They did not necessarily expect representation and therefore did not feel its absence as acutely. Others, on the other hand, considered this lack of diversity to be unfair, misleading, and not reflective of life in Canada. There seemed to be a consistent belief across the groups, however, that size and tenure led to the right to representation

*“When I was growing up in Ghana, we would watch movies from America but I never thought, ‘There’s no Black people.’ But when I came here and saw so many different cultures and still saw only white people on TV, I didn’t understand why that was. I talked about it with my friends and my sister.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

Respondents were also concerned about the impact that a lack of representation will have on their children and, by extension, the future of their communities. Many

felt that, without proper representation on television, there would be no role models. First generation Canadians in particular feared that future generations would lose contact with their cultural heritage and would simply be assimilated into mainstream culture.

*“It’s almost saying that Aboriginal people aren’t smart enough to be communicators because you don’t see those role models.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“As a woman, all women have role models on television but I can’t think of one Aboriginal role model.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“In my country, I would never be able to watch ‘Sex and Confidence.’ It’s taboo watching women like this. We can’t let our children integrate into this. We have to ask questions.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

Other respondents simply felt that the role of television is to entertain without an expectation to reflect diversity. In these cases they reported that they could still enjoy television by finding alternative ways of relating to the personalities and characters they saw on television (e.g., lifestage, occupation, age).

## **ii. Importance of Fair and Accurate Portrayal**

Many respondents felt strongly that a fair and accurate portrayal of their own ethnocultural or racial backgrounds could lead to positive change in society as a whole. Accurate and up-to-date representations were seen to have the potential to enlighten the rest of the population, and promote acceptance and understanding. Conversely, inaccurate or unfair portrayals were seen to reinforce existing stereotypes and promote racial tensions.

*“We need [more] exposure to show the good and the bad, the ups and downs, that not all kids are gang members.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“I find it kind of exhausting sometimes that I have to remind them that I am who I am and not what they think I am.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“People are still sticking to the same image there was forty, fifty years ago.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“Some Caucasian people will start speaking more slowly to me because they think I don’t understand. I’m probably as Canadian as they are.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“No Spanish speaker would ever say ‘no problemo.’ It’s a Quebec thing. And the worst thing is, if a Quebecer says that on his travels, he’s going to look like an idiot.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“When my sister’s roommate came to university, she’d never seen a Black person before and she was afraid because she’d seen them [on TV] as hotheaded.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“This year, living in Guelph was pretty insane. I don’t know if the people are just misinformed... I had a girl ask me if back in Somalia we had buildings. It’s pretty sad. I was the only Black person in my whole residence. There was one Asian guy in the building also. We were the only two people who weren’t white.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“For me, it happens all the time, I go to a party and people ask me where I’m from and when I tell them my mom is from Brazil, they ask me which tribe she’s from.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“On that show ‘7<sup>th</sup> Heaven’ they showed a small girl wearing a hijab. That’s a wrong projection – girls don’t wear the hijab...it’s a perception that’s been created” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“When I was crossing into New York, the moment the guy found out I was Middle Eastern background, he pulled me aside and went through my car. They’re more biased when you have a Middle Eastern background name.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

*“They’re painting everyone with one paint brush. They see a lot of negative activity on TV and they look at us, ‘Oh these guys are a bunch of gangsters.’” (Vancouver, South Asian background)*

*“I think it really segregates our children. You see them in schools, you see them sticking together and their friends are Indo-Canadians.” (Vancouver, South Asian background)*

*“Seeing more Aboriginals will help do away with the stereotype.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

Equally important, several respondents noted that the manner in which their ethnocultural or racial community was portrayed on television had a psychological impact on themselves as individuals, in particular on their self-esteem.

*“My brother grew up saying he’s Aboriginal, but I said I was white. I wouldn’t admit it because Aboriginals are believed to be bad people.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“I will talk with my friends about it, but it’s very difficult to talk to other people about it.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“I never thought of myself as Canadian until I traveled, I always thought I was a Black person.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“I don’t watch TV because I don’t feel good when I see something about my native country and they’re not saying anything good about it.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“We are judged because of the poverty they see in our home country, we can’t deny that. But it’s hard to take because we are doing well now – there are five of us here and we’ve worked hard.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

Compounding the issue some positive stereotypes were also reported to have a negative impact on self-esteem. Many of these stereotyped qualities and attributes set very high standards that are hard to live up to in real life.

*“Some of the positive stereotypes of Latinos are that they’re the best lovers or the best dancers. I can’t dance if my life depended on it and I go through life totally embarrassed.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“The media has to stop typecasting. Asian mothers are portrayed as being the best mothers and we run into problems when we try to help an Asian child because the mainstream media wonders how an Asian mother can neglect her child.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

“We’re not all good at math.” (Vancouver, Chinese background)

### **E. Cultural Diversity on Television in Canada versus the US**

The United States emerged as the most common point of comparison to Canada in terms of television programming, not only because of a cultural and geographic

proximity, but also due to Canadians' overwhelming familiarity with American programming.

Perceptions of cultural/racial diversity on television in Canada versus elsewhere were generally divided. Some participants felt strongly that Canadian television is more diverse than that of other countries, especially the United States. Others were equally adamant that representation is more balanced outside of Canada.

*"We're the maid, the chauffeur. I see it in the States, not so much in Canada." (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*"Canada doesn't focus on pointing fingers like the US does." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Male)*

Among those who saw greater diversity in American programs, some admit that this perception is based on a lack of familiarity with Canadian programming. Others pointed to financial factors that contribute to perceived diversity in the United States – many felt that the US has a larger ethnocultural and racial population to support diverse programming and that these groups have sufficient financial backing to get more representation on American television. Canada was considered to be “small potatoes” by comparison, with a smaller population and therefore, fewer financial resources.

*"In Quebec, we don't have the budgets like in the States. It'll all depend on the ratings. If you do something good and the public doesn't like it, you're not any further ahead." (Montreal, Asian background)*

*"I think that from the looks of it, the US is making more of an effort [to diversify] because there's more money down there, so they can release something more ethnic." (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

Among those who felt Canadian programs did a better job of reflecting diversity than American programs, many pointed to political and ideological factors that contribute to differences in representation. Many contrasted the Canadian “multicultural mosaic” with the American “melting pot” – in the US, programs are more likely to show visible minorities as integrated or assimilated into mainstream culture while in Canada television is more likely to showcase different ethnocultural and racial backgrounds.

*"I think that when it comes to Canadian television and Canadian news, it's always going to me more diverse than American TV. More opinions are going to be shown just because that's our population. We're very diverse, so a lot of opinions get represented on TV." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*"When you go to America, it's the melting pot. You're an American. When you come to Canada, you're an Arab-Canadian." (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Canadians are a tossed salad because even though we are New Canadians-Mixed Group together we all have our individual characteristics and cultures. The Americans are referred to as a melting pot – everyone just conforms.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“I find that Canadians are more diversified. On American news you don’t see a lot of East Indians or Chinese background. It’s usually just Caucasians and African-Americans.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“You become an American and you assimilate, it’s a melting pot. If you’re Indo-Canadian or Chinese background Canadian you still want to keep [your culture] but emphasize the Canadian part.” (Vancouver, South Asian background)*

## **F. Perceptions of Change in the Representation and Portrayal of Diversity**

When asked if they felt that the representation of ethnocultural and racial diversity on Canadian television has changed over the last five to ten years, the consensus across all groups was that the situation has improved. On the whole, respondents agreed that there has been positive momentum. They also expressed faith that the representation of diversity will continue to increase in future generations.

*“I don’t think the kids have stereotypes – maybe it’s too late for the older people.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

In part, the perception of increased diversity is related to the number of channels that have become available, both on cable and via satellite. Not only are conventional multicultural channels such as OMNI 1 and 2 now available, but some commented that, with the proper satellite or digital hook-up, they can now access programming from any ethnocultural group.

*“I have Rogers digital cable and I’m able to watch a different program that’s on the other side of the world. To me that’s an increase in representation.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Well, you see more of these multicultural channels. There are more Indian channels than there were in the past. I grew up with one, now there’s probably about half a dozen.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

There was also the perception that certain channels are more balanced in terms of representation of diversity and have made greater strides than others. In particular, TVO, CBC, A Channel and CityTV were mentioned as having improved representation on-air, although some feel this is at least partly a result of regulation or policy mandates. However, Aboriginal Peoples reported that they still felt excluded even from these stations.

However, it is also agreed that while representation has increased, it is still insufficient. Many feel that we, as Canadians, are just at the beginning of a long

process that will over time incorporate a wide range of cultures within the scope of mainstream Canadian television and society at large.

*“I think now they’re just starting to give Black people more positive characters. But still it’s kind of negative.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

While satellite and digital services were generally seen to contribute to the overall increase in diversity available on television, others voiced concerns that this programming is segregated from the mainstream and thus is not accessible to the majority of Canadians. As a result, many felt that this does not represent the reality of a multicultural society where people of different backgrounds interact regularly.

While some expressed a sense that representation in drama and other entertainment programs is increasing, most participants seemed to feel that most of the growth in ethnocultural and racial representation has occurred in fact-based programming such as news.

On the negative side, it was generally felt that there has recently been more representation in the news when something bad happened involving a certain cultural group or region (i.e., more Middle Eastern background representation after 9/11, more Chinese background representation during the SARS crisis) and that this type of representation may have had a negative impact.

### **G. Perceived Obstacles to Fair and Accurate Portrayal**

Near the end of the focus groups, respondents were asked what they saw as the primary obstacle currently preventing fair and accurate representation of ethnocultural and racial minorities and Aboriginal Peoples on Canadian television. In many cases, respondents reiterated earlier comments, but many also offered further insights stemming from the discussion.

Across all groups, respondents identified the biggest obstacle to be one of widespread ignorance and misconception about Canada’s racial and ethnocultural minorities and Aboriginal Peoples. Many attributed this knowledge gap to insufficient or inaccurate information from the media. Generalized representations of groups that “clump” people together were seen to foster this misinformation and reinforce stereotypes.

*“It’s ignorance. I’ll give you an example. When I came to this country, people asked me where I came from. When I told them Mexico, they said, ‘Oh you speak Mexican.’ When I told them I speak Spanish, they said, ‘But you’re not from Spain.’” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“The curriculum teaches about natives, but no Black history so that people can know who these Black people are – I didn’t learn about our people.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*



*“I had a boss who kept calling me Mexican and I would correct him and tell him I’m from El Salvador – but he would say, ‘what’s the difference, you’re all the same anyways?’ He was Irish, I should have said, ‘if that’s true, then I could call you English.’” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“People don’t know anything. Sometimes they don’t want to know.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

As a means of combating this lack of knowledge, many respondents pointed to a need for more informed writing and better character development in Canadian dramatic programs. Most felt that more and better research is an absolute necessity.

*“I think it takes a lot time to research and depict a culture accurately, and I don’t think they’ve taken the time. It’s more the Hollywood fix, just to get entertainment out of it.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I think for me, they should research better, to get a better idea about the different ethnic groups. Producers should go further.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“There’s nothing worse than seeing a white guy dressed up in Native attire. Give the work to the Natives. There’s a lot of Native actors out there that are trying to get work but they can’t because they can’t get past being an extra or a backdrop bartender. If they’re lucky they can get a line.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

*“I’d like to see more Aboriginal people in the media...as the people in front of the camera and behind the scenes.” (Winnipeg, Aboriginal background)*

*“For me, watching TV with Japanese culture, I always felt that if you’re putting that culture on TV, wouldn’t you research a little bit better to represent...?” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

For some respondents, Canada’s multicultural policy is perceived to reinforce stereotypes at a systemic level. By encouraging newcomers to maintain their cultural heritage, multiculturalism was seen to maintain a distance between minorities on one hand and mainstream Canadians on the other. Some first generation Canadians and new immigrants felt the effects of this isolation.

*“When you come here, they encourage people to remain in their ethnic communities, so you have small islands of people, so there is no integration. And on television there is nothing that will talk to you about this or that culture.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

Others believed that the lower socioeconomic status of some new Canadians perpetuates stereotypes and even creates new ones. One example from the Hispanic background Canadian groups connects low-income jobs and poor English- or French-language skills with some common stereotypes.

*“There’s a lack of awareness...I don’t have a job that fits with my education, and when I tell my Quebecois friends this, they don’t understand. It’s like they don’t know how immigration works.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“There’s a real malaise – and it has to do with the immigration policy – compared to France which is ethnocultural.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

Divergent agenda within certain ethnocultural and racial minorities also present barriers. Some of the respondents in these groups were simply not concerned enough with the issue of diversity to feel any need to take action. By contrast, many noted that the only way to improve the situation was to bolster support and resources from within each community and to self-promote.

*“But in our community, if they do a show about kids growing up, we got two views in our community, one’s very conservative and one’s very liberal. And if they put this show on about a girl getting ready to go on a date and stuff like that, that will offend half the people in the community.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“It’s us, it’s our kids. We’re the ones who have to say, ‘Okay go ahead.’ When I was growing up my parents were so strict and we weren’t allowed to [become actors]. It’s not necessarily the producers or directors, it’s us. We’re the ones that have to take that step and make it acceptable.” (Toronto, South Asian background, Female)*

*“But people think it’s not going to change anything to pick up the phone and complain about the commercial.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

*“We’re a very passive culture. We just accept whatever’s given to us because we want to keep things simple.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“Honestly, I don’t know if it can ever happen.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“The representation on TV does need work. Whether you be Indian, Latino, African, West Indian, it still needs a bit of work. We as a group should come together and demand what we want to see.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“The mainstream media should get involved in [multicultural TV], make quality programs...they’ve got the resources to do it.” (Vancouver, South Asian background, Male)*

*“I think Chinese background culture is a closed culture as it is and we enjoy our own community of people. Sometimes we just don’t care because we’re so comfortable within our own family group.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

On a related point, some participants in the groups were split on what constitutes fair and accurate portrayal and representation. Within some of the groups, for example, there were varied points of view as to whether the display of racial conflict reinforces negative perceptions, or whether it serves to remind people that tensions still exist and therefore promotes awareness and positive change.

*“I think everyone knows that racism exists and instead of portraying something positive, they always gotta bring in that negative racism thing.” (Halifax, Black-Canadian)*

## Appendix A – Media Habits

To set the context for these focus group discussions, participants were asked about their general media habits, including radio, newspapers, the Internet and television.

### Radio

Listening to mainstream local radio stations was high among respondents across both English and French speaking markets. The most commonly cited reason for listening was music and then news/information programming. Particular ethnic and cultural groups – Chinese, Black African and Middle Eastern backgrounds in Toronto – mentioned listening to more news/information programming, especially after the events of September 11<sup>th</sup> and the SARS crisis.

A number of respondents reported listening to culturally specific and third-language music programming but it was generally not often top-of-mind. Multicultural radio programs tended to come up top-of-mind more among newer immigrants, who reported listening to ethnic stations to “keep in touch” with their home countries. This was particularly prevalent among Haitians in Montreal. Respondents also mentioned that older generation immigrants tended to listen to third-language stations because of language barriers. Many also reported to listening to ethnic and multicultural stations because it offered broader, different perspectives. There was some awareness of ethnic programming among younger listeners but they were more likely to listen to mainstream music stations such as Flow 93.5 which was top-of-mind among Black Canadians in Toronto.

*“I don’t only listen to Haitian radio, but my friends and family are there.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“I listen to Radio Haiti because sometimes they have things about where I’m from.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“My grandmother listens, she’s at home...it’s probably because they don’t understand what’s on the other stations.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“SARS – when it was explained in Chinese background it was easier for them to understand.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“Multicultural CBC, 97.5 CKDU, different interviews, different points of view, for groups that are well organized: Greek, Arabic, Cuban, Caribbean.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“If you want news about your country you go and get it.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“CIUT - 88.1, ethnic music around world, information, different perspective.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

## Newspapers

Most respondents reported reading local or national Canadian newspapers to keep abreast of current news. Very few actually mentioned purchasing international newspapers. If they were seeking news about their home countries, they would often turn more to internet news sources, either online international radio stations or online news. Others, particularly second generation respondents, commented that they did not read foreign third-language papers because of lack of relevance and occasional language barriers.

*“It’s hard to read if you don’t know all the words – it’s not like the alphabet... it would take me a few hours to read.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“I don’t read the Japanese paper, I read the National Post.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“I’ll occasionally read Sing Tao, but it’s all regurgitated news.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“I read the Star and the community paper, but hardly ever read the Chinese background papers.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

Ethnic or third-language papers tended to be mentioned as secondary sources of news, primarily among new Canadians. Many stated that they found these papers (often distributed free) in local ethnic stores. About one third of Aboriginal respondents in Winnipeg and Quebec reported reading Aboriginal newspapers to maintain a connection with their heritage and culture.

The Toronto Black, African background group reported reading international papers from a variety of sources to gain different points of view (e.g. *New York Times, Guardian, Ethiopian paper, Somalian Express*).

*“Different point of view looking at French papers.” (Toronto, Black, African background)*

*“Spanish newspaper – free paper in the bakery shops.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“Islam...it’s distributed in the mosques or in the markets.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“The Dawn is an excellent paper, written in English... you can get it in a lot of Pakistani stores.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background, Female)*

*“Vietnamese Grocery store once a week.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group Immigrants)*

*“The West Indies Stores – Indo-Caribbean Times is free.” (Toronto, Black Caribbean)*

*“In order not to lose the language, I write in Montagnais. I also read the newspaper in our community, a weekly, in both languages.” (Quebec, Aboriginal background)*

*“I have Le Soleil delivered. I read it first, then at noon I read Le Journal du Quebec, then whatever I can get my hands on in the community – for the Aboriginal community.” (Quebec, Aboriginal background)*

## **Internet**

Similar Internet usage patterns were observed in all groups. Internet was most commonly used to download music, for banking, email, research, work, and instant messaging, etc.

A number of respondents mentioned streaming radio stations and reading newspapers online to gain different perspectives about world news events from international sources and to gain access to news related to their home country and communities.

*“I listen to Radio France International on the Internet.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

*“I spend 6-7 hours per week online reading Japanese newspapers and checking emails. When there’s a war or something you get better information.” (Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“[News] off the internet. Whatever I can find.” (Toronto, Black Caribbean)*

*“Vietnamese radio stations from California.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“Sometimes I go to the Salvador Press for my mother – I’ll read a little bi...And El Mercurio, Tessera, and Cote Mahora in the Dominican.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“Checking news back home, Manila Times, or 87.net web sites to see what’s happening in the Philippines.” (Vancouver, Asian background)*

*“Mediterranean Media for the Arab world.” and “Al Jazeera” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

One person mentioned specifically that he used the Internet as a cultural learning tool. A few participants mentioned ethnic or culturally-specific entertainment and information websites. Among Black Canadians in Halifax, BET.com and Black Planet came up top-of-mind

*“I discovered my own language on the Internet. I wanted to relearn Ojibway. It gave me a complete dictionary of the whole language.” (Quebec, Aboriginal background)*

## **Television**

Television viewing habits varied among respondents in the groups. Decreased viewing among some was due to change in lifestyles and less interest in the quality

and types of programs on television. A number of respondents mentioned watching more television because of greater access to, and selection of, international news, information and entertainment programming through digital and satellite TV subscriptions.

*“Less. Before, I was a lot more loyal to programming. Now I watch TV when I have time.”  
(Montreal, Asian background)*

*“Less. I’m more busy, homework, family. If I had a soap or whatever, I’d watch it loyally, if I have the time. If I don’t, too bad.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“I hardly have time to watch TV. Before, I didn’t work so I had lots of time to watch.”  
(Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“More, because there are more channels, more options.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group)*

*“A couple of years ago there wasn’t these specialty channels, so there wasn’t as many options.”  
(Vancouver, Southeast Asian background)*

*“It has changed for me. I used to have cable with Vidéotron. Now I have Illico and I can get the European channels that I knew when I was in Haiti.” (Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“I compare RDI with TV5 because it picks up European news. European news is better.”  
(Montreal, Black, African/Caribbean background)*

*“I can choose more what I like to watch, like more reality or more business programs. Before it was just sitcoms on CBS or something but now there’s more choices available.” (Vancouver, Chinese background)*

A few participants mentioned watching more television as a way of spending more time with their children.

*“I watch more children’s programs. It’s a time when I can relax with the kids.” (Montreal, Asian background)*

*“I have young children. Sometimes the younger one needs me to sit with him and sometimes the other kids want me to watch with them. I spend more time watching with my kids.”  
(Montreal, Hispanic background)*

While television generally fills both information and entertainment needs, new Canadians mentioned using television as an educational tool for learning the language and culture.

*“I watch TV more compared to when I [first] came to Canada. You come here, you should know everything happening here and the quickest way is to watch TV. It helps me to know the culture here and the personalities.” (Toronto, Chinese background)*

*“More because when I got married my husband didn’t really understand English.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

Several recent immigrants said that they watched ethnic programming as a means of retaining their cultural identity and language within the family:

*“[Watching] more. We have Spanish TV on between 4 p.m. and 7 p.m., CNN Espanola or Spanish soap operas. And we have a two year old and we want him to learn Spanish—he’s with an English babysitter all day—so he listens.” (Toronto, Hispanic background)*

*“...even when I was young I rebelled against my parents, they tried to make me watch ART.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

*“The Arabic channel on digital...it’s on constantly. My mother’s addicted. It’s forced upon me – it’s the only culture I get. But it’s so Americanized.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

As with other forms of media, some respondents mentioned they were watching more news and information programs after the events of September 11th. Many also stated they were accessing international news sources to obtain a broader perspective. This was especially true among participants from Middle Eastern backgrounds:

*“Before I used to watch soap operas, talk shows, or movies, but as so many different things have happened in our world I’ve started watching the news channel and I used to never watch the news.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

*“BBC Newsworld is widely held to do a great job of covering international news – ‘comes closest’ to presenting a truly world view of the news.” (Halifax, New Canadians-Mixed Group Immigrants)*

*“Right now I’m more dependant on the television to inform me on what’s going on around the world. And I try to watch all different kinds of news channels, from CBC to CNN and even the Middle Eastern background news channels just because sometimes you’re not gonna agree with what they say and it’s really interesting to get different perspectives on what’s going on.” (Toronto, Middle Eastern background)*

*“I watch more news programs than I used to.” (Montreal, Middle Eastern background)*

**Favourite channels:** In English speaking Canada, most respondents mentioned watching mostly American mainstream entertainment programs such as *Friends*, *Will & Grace*, *Frasier*, *Seinfeld*, *Fear Factor*, *American Idol*, *Law & Order* etc. Respondents in Montreal and Quebec City reported watching French Canadian produced programming along with American shows. These included such programs as: *Le Point*, *Decouverte*, *La Fureur*, *Star Academie* *Le Grand Blond*, *Les Grands Reportages*.

A number of respondents mentioned watching culturally-relevant programming. The Black Canadian groups in Toronto and particularly in Halifax reported watching BET and KTLA as part of their television viewing habits. Favourite shows included a number of “Black” shows or ones that feature prominent Black characters (*Girlfriends, Judge Joe Brown, My Wife and Kids, Bernie Mack, Oprah*).

Among those of Hispanic background/Latin backgrounds, Telelatino was top-of-mind. Improved access to digital or satellite feeds also prompted more viewing of ethnic language television.

*“Watching more programs in Spanish because there is more programming available in other languages now (CNN Espanola, Spanish soaps, TLN). (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

*“Spanish soaps...it’s a dangerous thing – like a cult or a drug – they last 4-5 months.” (Montreal, Hispanic background)*

About one-third of participants from Aboriginal groups in Winnipeg and Quebec groups stated they watched APTN - mainly those who felt a strong connection to their culture and heritage.

*“I watch it quite a bit. I’m always looking just to see what’s on.” (Vancouver, Aboriginal background)*

Among Canadians of South Asian backgrounds, many were familiar with culturally diverse programming, but few watched regularly. Top-of-mind programs included the Sunday morning Indian block on CityTV, *Reflections on Islam* on Vision, and *South Asian Newsweek, Eye on Asia*, and movies on OMNI.

***Top-of-mind personalities and characters:*** Generally, when asked about personalities and characters on television, most respondents in English speaking groups noted American television personalities. When probed, a few Canadian personalities, most commonly news anchors and reporters, were mentioned.

Among those respondents in the Quebec groups, local French Canadian personalities almost always came up as first mentions.

For the most part, respondents were hard pressed to come up with culturally diverse personalities. Several groups were unable to remember *any* television personalities who belonged to their ethnic group. Some culturally diverse news personalities from local stations tended to be top-of-mind, mostly in Vancouver and Toronto.



## **Appendix B – Focus Group Discussion Guide**

### ***Introduction (5 minutes)***

- Our subject this evening is about media and your perceptions of the current representation of cultural and ethnic diversity in media...
- Encourage all views, sensitive topic for some but you're all here because each of you has a unique and important point of view – you don't all have to agree
- Microphones and one-way mirror
- Confidentiality
- First names

### ***Warm-up (5 minutes)***

I'd like to begin with a very general discussion about your individual backgrounds...

ASK, AS APPLICABLE:

- Where you were born, if not born here – how long you have lived in Canada and in which cities?
- What languages you speak?
- Occupation, family – kids, hobbies or interests?

### ***Media Habits (10 minutes)***

As I mentioned, we're going to be talking about media this evening, let's start with...

#### **Radio**

- Do you listen to the radio?
- Which radio stations do you listen to? (PROBE FOR NAMES/CALL LETTERS)
- (ASK IF APPLICABLE) What about stations that broadcast in languages other than English (French)?

PROBE: Which ones? How often do you listen?  
What do you like about these stations?

### **Newspapers**

- Do you read any newspapers? Which ones?
- What about newspapers written in languages other than English (French)?

PROBE: Which ones? How often do you read them?  
What do you like about these papers?

### **Internet**

- Do you use the Internet?
- What do you usually do when you are online?
- What are some of the websites that you like to visit?

PROBE: Local, national, international sites

### **Television (10 minutes)**

- What cable or satellite TV service do you have in your household?

ON FLIPCHART:

- What channels, stations or networks would you say are your favourites?

PROBE: Top 3 channels for each respondent  
*Channels broadcasting in languages other than English/French?*

- What shows/programs do you like watching on television?

PROBE: Top 3 shows for each respondent  
*Programs in languages other than English/French?*

- Now, thinking about the different personalities or characters that you see on television, which ones come to mind?

PROBE: Canadian, local  
News/dramas/sitcoms etc.

- Compared to five or six years ago, would you say that your television viewing habits have changed? If yes, how?

PROBE: Watching more or less television

Different programs/channels  
More / Less TV in a language other than English/French

- How is the role of television different for you vs. other members of your family?

PROBE: Young and old?  
Parents, siblings, kids?

- Thinking of the different media we've been talking about – radio, television, newspapers, Internet – which one would you say is most influential in shaping social attitudes? Why?

### **Representation and Portrayal of Cultural Diversity on Television (20 min)**

For the rest of the group, I'd like to get back to the issue of cultural and ethnic diversity on television – in other words, who and what we see on TV.

Canada is a diverse society – getting more and more diverse every year – with people from all different backgrounds...

- In general, would you say that this diversity is reflected in the shows and programs that you watch on TV?
- Which groups do you see most often? Which ones are under-represented?

PROBE: Representation proportionate to populations

- Which types of programs or channels are more likely to show people from different cultures? Which ones are less likely?

PROBE: News/dramas/sitcoms  
Local/national/international  
Canadian/American

- How important is it to you personally to see people of various racial and cultural backgrounds on television?

PROBE: Ever consciously thought about it before?  
Ever a subject of conversation with friends/family?

- Do you think there's more diversity on mainstream television over the last five to ten years, less or about the same amount?

PROBE: Where's the difference?

### **Representation and Portrayal of Specific Cultures/Ethnicities (30 minutes)**

Now, let's talk more specifically about the representation and portrayal of people from the (INSERT CULTURAL BACKGROUND) on television...

- Do you see (INSERT) people represented on television?

PROBE: How often? Where? What type of shows?  
Examples (specific characters, personalities, news items)

- In your opinion, are (INSERT) people represented differently in the media than other cultural/ethnic groups? How?
- How are (INSERT) portrayed in the media?

PROBE: What are some of the stereotypes you've seen?  
Character roles (superficial/token vs. lead/hero)  
Type of actors chosen to play the role  
Presence or absence of accent  
Primary vs. secondary/supporting characters

- What is the difference between a negative and a positive portrayal of (INSERT) people?

PROBE: Examples of positive and negative portrayals

- How do you feel when you see a (INSERT) man or woman on television?

PROBE: Pay more attention?  
More sensitive to portrayal?  
What gets your back up? What makes you smile?

- What kind of influence or impact do you think these portrayals have on you, your family, or your children? Or on how other people perceive your community?

PROBE: Effect on self-image?

### **Wrap (10 minutes)**

- In the future, how would you like to see people of your cultural background represented on TV?

PROBE:      What is fair? What is accurate?  
                  What is ultimately desirable?  
                  Degree of integration into mainstream culture vs. traditional  
                  cultural representation

- If you could influence the production of programs on television, what changes – if any – would you suggest?
- In your opinion, what is the main obstacle between this ideal and what we currently see on television? Where is it breaking down?
- How would you suggest television should change in order to better reflect Canada's ethnocultural and racial diversity? Or should it?

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