TELEVISION IN BLACK AND WHITE

Ethnic Stereotypes and Popular Television

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by

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THE LANGUAGE OF RACE

As Marshall McLuhan so aptly put it, the medium is the message and as we
approach the twenty-first century, what are the dominant messages being
transmitted to the populace? One fundamental message, as the Soviet Union
attempts to maintain a semblance of unity amongst its states, and Eastern Europe
witnesses internecine violence, is that of conflict and, specifically, conflict
which is ethnically-orientated, occurring between groups which were once
regarded as homogeneous. In France, the resurgence of Fascist groups presages a
unified Europe divided by ethnicity and notions of who are legitimate citizens
of Europe and who not. In Britain, rioting in the suburbs is linked by some to
deprivation and others to criminality but both possibilities contain implicit
and explicit assumptions of who are the deprived and who are the criminal.

How then do these themes impact upon the consciousness and inform the
perceptions of social beings? Given the primacy of television in the lives of
the community, what role does it play in the interpretation of social life, both
real and imaginary? It cannot be seriously disputed that the medium of
television is the most popular of all cultural media in the late twentieth
century with viewing figures now averaging 3.5 hours per day (IBA, 1990). That
television has the potential power to influence opinion and attitude can be
confirmed by the billions of pounds which are spent annually on advertising and
sponsorship - for the year ended March 1989, the Independent Broadcasting
Authority received œ1,741m in net advertising revenue (IBA, 1989). Television
has the power to inform and raise awareness about issues which are socially
significant, such as unemployment, crime, conflict, AIDS or drug abuse, as well
as simply performing an entertainment role for its audience. However, it is
precisely this power to inform and 'educate' which can transform an issue into a
problem into a panic, by continued and exaggerated exposure.

The seriousness with which the output of television is regarded confers a
particular responsibility on the medium which it is sometimes unable to live up
to. Although this is not to say that television deliberately misinforms its
audience, what does appear to happen is that it links in with what are seen as
the currently fashionable views and especially the current problems, and gives
them a new name so that a new problem appears to have emerged - mugging and
child abuse are old problems but they used to be called street robbery and baby
battering. Television can thus be seen to both reflect popular values, for
example, concern with law and order, but also to amplify events by their
concentrated treatment. The media, including television, do not simply reflect
society, they set the parameters, locate the agenda and identify what the issues
are, helping to shape public understanding of the kind of society in which we
live.

Although both print and broadcast media are quick to respond to national and
international events, it is television which is regarded as the most credible
medium and which enjoys a signal popularity as the information source, par
excellence in the lives of the British public, where 99 per cent of the
population own at least one TV set and 65 per cent use television as the main
source of information about world events (IBA, 1989). Although contemporary
media research suggests that television does not have a direct and identifiable
impact upon behavioural change (cf Troyna, 1981), it clearly has some effect, no
matter how subliminal.

The advertisers' belief in the power of the medium is mirrored by the initiation
in 1988 of the Broadcasting Standards Council to act as watchdog for taste and
decency in programming. In the winter of 1989, a declaration of principles and
a code of practice was published by all national newspapers and signed by every
editor except two, in an effort to persuade the general public that reporting
standards will be 'improved' via a mechanism of self-regulation. One of the

practices to be avoided is the irrelevant reference to 'race, colour and religion'. Although there is clearly a measure of self-interest in such action, that is, to circumvent the need for curbing legislation, it is nonetheless a positive step for the newspaper world to take.

The public service broadcast channel, the BBC, on the other hand, has been reversing the trend for sensitivity and balance in the last few years by changing key wording in its mandate relating to the areas in which it deems it inappropriate to remain impartial. Between 1974 and 1986 the annual BBC Handbook contained the following wording under the heading 'Controversy, Impartiality and Independence', with the underlined words being removed from the Handbook in subsequent years (BBC Handbooks, 1974, 1987).

The BBC does not feel obliged....to appear neutral as between truth and untruth, justice and injustice, freedom and slavery, compassion and cruelty, tolerance and intolerance (including racial intolerance)

Fiction and fact in television
If television has a role to inform and educate as well as entertain, then it is uniquely well-placed to make a positive contribution to the pursuit of inter-ethnic harmony through the accurate representation of ethnic minority groups. If it is assumed that audiences do not simply sit passively on, allowing images to gently wash over them but instead positively interact with the text, then television is potentially a tool for either confirming or challenging preconceived notions and ideas. Notwithstanding the value of factual programming in identifying and highlighting issues which contain an ethnic dimension, for example, racial harassment or discrimination, it is arguably through programmes which are regarded as popular that the greatest potential for changing attitudes and therefore behaviour, exist.

It is argued here that the representation of positive ethnic minority characters in, say, a soap opera would be of greater benefit in challenging prejudiced assumptions about such groups than, say, a documentary about the poor academic achievements of ethnic minority school children. This is because, to a large extent, the constant 'problematising' of ethnic communities confirms the view that such groups are 'other' and 'different' to mainstream white society and do not suffer the same category of problem as their white counterparts, but rather 'create' problems by their very existence. In addition, the audience for documentaries is, relatively speaking, small and such programmes tend, in any case, to be preaching to the converted. However, providing a sympathetic, credible and, most importantly, 'ordinary' role for an ethnic minority performer, who is seen to live an ordinary life with ordinary people and have ordinary problems and whose skin is incidental, implicitly suggests that essential differences between ethnic groups are more imagined than real. It is for these reasons that this essay concentrates on the representation of ethnic minority communities in fictional rather than factual texts and, more specifically, in those television programmes which attract high numbers of viewers and are thus regarded as 'popular'.

It is argued here that the white majority's assumptions about ethnic minorities exist as fixed although not completely immutable ideas which have been and continue to be transmitted through cultural media and that one highly significant vehicle through which such assumptions are regularly reinforced and reproduced is that of television. It is further argued that:

-       the majority of people now use television as one of their primary news and information sources and regard such broadcast material as an accurate statement about the world;

-       social relations are affected and influenced in the real world by the representation of such social relations in the imaginary world of television;

-       negative and stereotypical assumptions amongst the white majority hinder the pursuit of ethnic harmony and equal opportunity and, given at least the potential of television to change opinion and behaviour, the narrative themes and iconography contained within television programmes could play a significant role in encouraging or preventing attitudinal, and thus behavioural, change over time.

How then does television depict ethnic minority communities? Are Black and Asian characters integrated into the main narrative themes or are they simply tokenistic? Are their roles stereotypical or do they portray the whole repertoire of possible types? What impact do ethnic minority characters have on the white viewing public? Do such role types confirm or challenge preconceived notions about ethnic minority communities and do they advance or hinder the pursuit of ethnic harmony and equality?

The research study on which this essay is based was conducted in order to answer the questions above and, more specifically, to look at the white viewer and her/his relationship with popular television and ethnic imagery (Ross, 1990). In a multi-cultural environment which is becoming increasingly dependent on television-centred sources of information and entertainment, how does the white viewer comprehend the ethnic image and what preconceptions does s/he bring to bear when watching ethnic characterisations in television fictions?

Viewing the viewers
The main research devices used in the research study were semi-structured questionnaire schedules and discussions with approximately 650 young white students at six further education establishments in the West Midlands. This sample population was chosen for several reasons. They constitute the 'TV generation', brought up on a staple diet of televisual material and could be expected to have watched a great deal of television in their formative years and to have learnt about the world from this primary source. Young people in the West Midlands could also reasonably be expected to have been educated in schools which included significant ethnic minority populations and/or to have personal experience of ethnic minority groups, either as friends or neighbours or both, given that the West Midlands has a well-established Asian and to a lesser extent, Black population. Thus young white viewers could be expected to use television as a major information and entertainment source and to be personally knowledgeable about ethnic minority people.

The questionnaire used with this sample population contained two different but related sets of questions: those relating to stereotypes and television, and those which asked more general questions about Black and Asian people. The two different but related sets of questions were used since the viewer comprehends televisual material within a more general framework of personal experience and belief. In order to make sense of what the viewer believes about television's representation of ethnic minority people, it is first necessary to examine how s/he regards such people at an individual level. The questions encouraged students to describe different ethnic groups using given 'typical' classifications but also to identify whether these same stereotypes were discernible in television characterisations. Whilst such phraseology could be regarded as rather leading, the common currency of stereotypical imagery was sufficiently strong to produce only a small minority of students who were unable or unwilling to use the categories of choice offered. If ethnic stereotypes did not exist, then it could be expected that those questions which rely on such concepts for their 'sense' would achieve negligible responses, which was not the case. However, it is accepted that the creation of a range of possible human characteristics and abilities is necessarily subjective.

In addition to the student sample population, the research study also sought the views of television professionals, those individuals responsible for what is actually broadcast on television, that is, those people who select, direct and edit programmes. It is important to identify the way in which such individuals comprehend issues such as ethnicity and stereotypes since such understanding will necessarily inform the way in which the treatment of these issues will be viewed by the 'objective' eye of media professionals. Of the twelve personalities originally contacted, six individuals agreed to take part in the study. The three commissioning editors were Jim Moir, Head of Light Entertainment at the BBC and Farrukh Dhondy and Peter Ansorge at Channel 4, commissioning editors for Multi-cultural programming and Drama respectively. An independent producer (Bernard Clark) was also interviewed, as were the producers of two ethnic minority programmes: Narendhra Morar for BBC's Network East now called simply East and Zia Mohyeddin for Central Television's Here and Now. Follow-up interviews with the three commissioning editors were carried out 12 months after the first set of interviews.
The interviews for the research which took place in the period 1988-89 (with follow-up interviews in November 1990) with students and television

professionals were complemented by a short TV monitoring exercise, conducted during September 1989 in an effort to corroborate or challenge the main findings which emerged from the research - the monitoring study is discussed in a later section.

ETHNIC ICONS IN MOVING PICTURES

The ways in which social beings think about themselves and each other do not develop in a vacuum. Attitudes and behaviour are conditioned by a variety of factors including experiential learning and common sense understanding. We do not greet each new experience with a blank mind but instead insert such experiences into a complicated matrix which forms part of our personal frame of reference. Common-sense knowledge, on the other hand, does not derive from actual experience but is simply known through oral history traditions, through print and latterly through broadcast media.

Popular media forms such as television provide the majority of white viewers with their only experience of ethnic minority communities and what becomes known about different ethnic groups becomes less determined by direct personal experience and more over-determined by the 'truth' as interpreted and understood by the mass media. Stereotypes are, arguably, historically specific and the imagery and language associated with particular groups gradually becomes inappropriate or outdated in any given period, so new forms are devised to maintain the fundamental stereotypical concept - the 'coolies' of yesterday are the 'Pakis' of today. But stories change in the re-telling and lapses occur between events and experiences and their subsequent written description.

The twilight zone that lies between living memory and written history is one of the favourite breeding places of mythology. (Woodward, 1974, p.xvi)

A variety of stereotypes have been created about Black and Asian people which are rooted in folklore, tales and myths and have become transformed into common-sense 'facts' through written and oral history. The stereotype of the Black 'savage' who can only be civilised by the white man is at least 400 years old and finds contemporary expression in reportage on the developing world where child-like natives are shown aspects of 'civilisation' by white aid workers. The savage myth encouraged feelings of fear in the white breast so that all Black individuals were (and still are) regarded as dangerous and threatening. Such sentiments of course live on and are manifest in everyday society through the typification of, for example, the young Black male as criminal and/or mugger: the other popular association of the Black community with drug abuse adds further credence to the assertion of Black as deviant.

The 'noble savage' stereotype is a variation on the more general 'savage' icon and whilst it does not connote quite the same level of perjorative assumption, the barbarian is scarcely mitigated by its nobility. In the nineteenth century, primitives were saved from themselves by the shining light of Christianity - more recently, salvation is through cash. Thus the dependency myth is closely associated with the traditional pagan-christian dichotomy where primitive meant (and still means) inferior, and even the socially aware documentary which describes the life of, say, a Masai warrior, is unable, ultimately, to make the intellectual leap required to see beyond the quaint customs, to regarding such lifestyles as not just different to those of Western society but possibly better and potentially enviable. In the British context, the lure of the small-holding, high on some remote Welsh hilltop is becoming more and more attractive as individuals rebel against the technological age.

The typification of the 'nigger minstrel' also has a long history as Fryer has noted (Fryer, 1984), implying that singing and dancing are qualities inate to the Black man and woman so that in contemporary society, it is in the field of

entertainment to which the hopes of Black youth should orientate their aspirations: the cerebral life is clearly not appropriate for their ambitions. Associated with the Black entertainer myth is that of the Black sports star, which assumes that all Black people are endowed with natural athleticism in the same way as they are accorded their singing and dancing prowess (cf Cashmore, 1982). Once again, the Black individual is placed firmly in the realm of the physical, leaving his/her white counterpart to compete in the more privileged, lucrative and 'civilised' domain of the intellect.

Most of the popular stereotypes and myths which have been identified thus far are associated with the Black community, that is individuals from Afro-Caribbean and/or African communities, but the myths which surround the Asian persona are equally ubiquitous but rather less varied. It seems likely that Asian stereotypes emerged as a direct result of British colonial rule in India so that Asian people came to be regarded as passive and inherently docile. Common-sense ethnocentrism asserts that a people who have been conquered and colonised in their own country must be naturally inferior and weak, notwithstanding Britain's own history of defeat and domination by invading hordes. But there are paradoxes in the Asian stereotype since, although the Asian character is inherently weak, it is also devious, although passive it also tends towards internecine carnage. The contradictions which exist in the stereotypical perception of the Asian 'type' have found contemporary expression in the view that all Asians are timid grocers whilst at the same time being a community of religious and blood-thirsty fanatics. The furore over Salman Rushdie's The Satanic Verses has left an indelible mark on the entire Asian community, where all Asian groups, whether Hindu, Muslim, Sikh or Jain (or any other) are regarded as pursuing the same extreme fundamentalist beliefs as the small but vocal minority which did speak out against Rushdie, both within Britain and without. The Asian community in toto have thus been found guilty of a serious confidence trick: on the one hand wanting to live in Britain and, ipso facto, benefit from the experience, but at the same time, clinging to the religious dictums of an entirely 'other' culture.

The desire to retain cultural practices, including language and religion, is further proof, if any were needed, of the essential 'otherness' of such non-white communities - despite the fact that the great majority of Black Britons have been born here - and confirms their 'alienism' from the view of the white majority. A telling example of the way in which exclusionist mechanisms operate in segregating different parts of the British population can be found in Norman Tebbit's now infamous 'cricket test' jibe where he suggested, in a Los Angeles interview, that very few British Asians would pass the cricket test:

Which side do they cheer on? It's an interesting test. Are you still harking back to where you came from or where you are? I think we've got real problems in that regard... (Norman Tebbit cited in the Daily Telegraph, 19.4.1990)

and again, when refuting the charge of racism he replies:

...that's a very foolish thing [to say] because if you say to a lot of people out there in the street that Tebbit is racist then they'll scratch the backs of their heads and say, 'Well, so am I. If that's what being a racist is, then I'm one as well.' (bid)

In other words, Asians in Britain are Asian first and British second, so that their loyalty will always be to their 'homeland', again ignoring the fact that 'homeland' for many Black and Asian Britons is Britain. Although it is not expressly articulated, it is implied that such loyalty is entirely natural and so, if it is entirely natural for British Asians to pledge their first loyalty to their own ethnic countrymen and women, then it is equally natural for British whites to have their first loyalty to the white British community. From this point, it is but a small step to argue that if it is natural to support one's own ethnic group, it is also natural to be hostile towards other ethnic groups.

Therefore ethnocentrism is entirely natural and understandable, and no one should be surprised at inter-ethnic hostility since this is entirely natural too.

The racial and racist stereotypes which have proliferated since at least the sixteenth century still retain popularity among many white Britons today and it is suggested here that such stereotypes have been transmitted and perpetuated through both oral history traditions and literature but that such media have been superseded in importance by television which has become the dominant cultural medium in Britain in the late twentieth century. It is also suggested here that television programmes (and, by implication, producers) collude in the perpetuation of stereotypes, if only because they fail to challenge stereotypical assumptions and imagery and thus reproduce and compound such assumptions.

The nature of television
Since the beginning of the 1950s when television sets became commonplace, researchers have tried to assess the influence and impact of television on the viewing public. Early research was commissioned by television companies to see how well programmes were being received, the number of viewers watching different programmes and the type of programmes watched, in order to plan schedules and attract more viewers. With the arrival of independent commercial television in 1955 (and Channel 4 in 1982, not to mention the numerous channels ushered in by new technology and deregulation), research began and continues to be carried out by advertising companies among others, to gauge the extent of television's influence on attitudinal and behavioural change.

At a theoretical level, media research and particularly that concerned with television has followed two broad paths - one examining the links between the media and the powerful in society, that is, looking at the medium, and the other looking at the relationship between the medium and the audience, that is, looking at the message. This essay is broadly concerned with the latter and is interested in exploring what impact the messages of television, in as much as they relate to ethnic minority populations, have on its audience and in particular, its predominantly white audience.

The way in which ethnicity has been treated in the media began to shift significantly in the 1970s from looking at problems of immigration to looking at problems caused by resident ethnic communities.

The emphasis of the media in the area of race relations changed substantially from a habitual concern in the 60s with the number of black people entering the country to the problems associated with their presence...from being an 'external threat' to becoming 'the outsider within'. (Verma, 1988, pp.127-128)

Research carried out in the 1970s by Hartmann & Husband attempted to ascertain whether or not television contributes to the formation and shaping of attitudes towards ethnic minority peoples and, if such an effect did exist, whether it was a distinctive contribution or merely reiterated and reinforced prevailing ideas (Hartmann & Husband, 1974).

The indications are that people tend to notice and recall information that is consistent with their existing attitudes...thus the less hostile appear more likely to learn from the media about the discrimination and disadvantages suffered by the coloured population while the more hostile are more aware of their association with crime and rioting... (Hartmann & Husband, 1974, p.94)

If it is accepted that television can impact upon attitudes, then the potential exists for television texts to challenge and change beliefs and assumptions. In the context of improving inter-ethnic relations and encouraging equality, how does television contribute to an understanding of the differences and perhaps

more importantly, the similarities between ethnic groups? For the majority of
television fictions and images, the answer to this question can be comprehended
by the term stereotype. It is argued here that the majority of ethnic
characterisations on British television are stereotypical in form and content
and that the origins of such visual imagery are rooted in cinematic
representations which, in turn, can be traced back through the history of black-
white relations. Where images of minority groups are scarce and those which do
exist are stereotyped, then it is likely that such images will be seen as being
representative of such groups. The way in which television provides
simplifications of the social world precludes the medium from being able to
present formulations which are anything but stereotypical. The time constraints
which exist in the production of programmes encourage the use of simplistic
notions of good/bad, hero/villain, so that such characterisations are presented
in simple, two-dimensional schemas. Equally, the constant competition for
audiences must inevitably mean a dilution of complex ideas for the sake of
producing more popular programming formats, so that the less challenging and
more familiar (and thus more comfortable and comforting) material is more often
broadcast. The media, and especially television, select what the audience is to
see, how it is to be contextualised and whose assumptions are to be peddled.

What [the] media produce is, precisely, representations of the social
world...the media construct for us a definition of what race is, what meaning
the imagery of race carries and what the problem of race is understood to be.
They help to classify out the world in terms of the categories of race. (Hall,
1981, p.17)

The concepts of representation and representativeness are the two main issues
which need to be considered when discussing ethnic minority characters in
television fictions, that is, how Black and Asian people are characterised in
popular programmes, whether such characters embrace the diversity of human
experience and whether Black and Asian roles accurately reflect their respective
communities.

White perspectives
How then do the young white viewing public regard ethnic minority characters in
popular television and to what extent do ethnic images from television inform
and direct their experiences and understanding of such communities and do their
own experiences of ethnic minority groups, as neighbours or friends, mediate the
TV message? In the research study into ethnic stereotypes and television
already described (Ross, 1990), the sample population were asked a number of
questions relating both to general views on minority populations and more
specific questions on ethnic characterisations, and the remainder of this
section will consider the main findings of that research study.

As Table 1 demonstrates, over one-fifth of all respondents spontaneously
reported 'racism' as being a serious problem in Britain, more serious than
either crime or drug abuse. This finding would seem to indicate that young
white people are aware of the extent of discrimination which exists although
such problems are regarded as belonging to other people. However, a small
minority also regarded immigration as a problem for Britain despite the fact
that immigration legislation has reduced the number of people entering the
country to virtually nil, certainly as far as immigration from the developing
world is concerned.

Table 1 - What do you think are the main problems in Britain today?

Unemployment	27
Crime	13
Violence	23
Poverty	11
Racism	21

AIDS 8
         Drug abuse 19
         Health service   6
         Politics/Government   10
         Immigration 4

 [NB - top 10 responses]

Table 2 - Where did you first learn of such problems?

         Television 64
         Newspapers 30
         Family   24
         Experience 20
         Friends   19

[NB - top 5 responses]

The sample population were asked about their views on immigration laws and the
majority (75 per cent) felt that such laws were a good thing. The main reasons
for supporting such legislation were because it prevents general overcrowding
(29 per cent) and because it reduces the number of Black and Asian people
entering Britain (17 per cent)

Table 3 - What are the main differences between White, Black and Asian people?

         AGREE

Religion   75
Culture   73
Colour   61
Attitude   42
Intelligence   7

Table 4 - What problems (if any) are created by these differences?

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     AGREE

Understanding/tolerance 38
Racism       34
Tension/conflict  24
Other 10
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[86 per cent of respondents mentioned at least one associated problem]

Tables 3 and 4 demonstrate that young whites are aware of differences between ethnic groups such as religion and culture but more particularly, are aware that such differences can and do cause problems. However, more than just acknowledging differences in cultural practice and skin colour, there is a belief that there are serious and fundamental qualitative differences between different groups. In a recent trans-European study conducted by the Times Mirror Centre, Britain was found to be one of the 'top' three countries (after Poland and Italy) in exhibiting xenophobic tendencies (Times Mirror Centre study cited in the Guardian, 4.10.1991). Thus differences are not just in kind but in substance.

More than a third of respondents reported problems of understanding and tolerance, suggesting blame on both sides, but more or less equal numbers also suggest 'racism' which would seem to imply that many problems are caused to ethnic minority groups rather than by them.

Typical responses to this question included:

Many short-sighted people are prejudiced against these people because of different religion and culture.

Violent outbreaks - they are intruding on our culture with their ways, religion, temples, attitudes, etc.

Social integration, resentment with living space and employment - dislike of the unlike.

Blacks always consider themselves to be badly treated.

They all have a chip on their shoulder, also if they come to the UK they must learn to speak English. Good old rural Britain's going downhill because of this.

Black people reluctant to change to white beliefs and attitudes.

People don't fully understand each other's cultures, the colour and religion of people - causes differences in viewpoints.

Students were also asked about multi-ethnic neighbourhoods and whether or not problems were caused by different ethnic groups living in the same area. The majority (91 per cent) of respondents believed that multi-ethnic neighbourhoods do cause problems including racism, lack of understanding and conflict. Typical comments generated by this question included:

Segregation of shops, social venues leads to isolation of groups and they feel unacceptable and can rebel.

Mainly attitude ones, indoctrination of young people to follow certain cultures/religions.

Asian families tend to take over an entire street when they move into a house.

Racial discrimination to whites.

Whites hating the way Asian families cook smelly curries and walk up and down the street in packs of 10 or 20 (they did it in our street).

Discrimination, but the Asians didn't cause it.

The fact that white people don't like blacks ruining the environment.

More than a fifth of respondents reported having personally experienced racial discrimination, mainly through verbal abuse (72 per cent) or physical abuse (13 per cent). In discussion groups with respondents, a number of young people mentioned being picked-on by gangs of Black youth and there was a pervasive view that because of 'positive discrimination', no one could get a job any more unless they were 'coloured'.

There was a recurring theme of blame amongst the sample population, where ethnic communities are faulted for not immersing themselves thoroughly in Britishness, thereby courting resentment and hostility amongst the indigenous whites. Respondents were asked whether Black, white and Asian people should make more of an effort to get to know each other and the majority (82 per cent) thought that this should happen. However, more than a quarter believed that Asian people make the least effort, although a further quarter reported that all ethnic groups (including whites) were equally remiss in building bridges.

Slightly more than a fifth of respondents had Black or Asian neighbours although nearly half the sample believed that at least a quarter of their local population were Black or Asian. Nearly two-thirds of respondents had Black or Asian friends and a quarter of these reported that such friends were 'nicer and/or more friendly' than other Black and Asian people. Respondents were also asked how they thought their friends regarded ethnic minority groups and 25 per cent reported hostility amongst their friends with, not surprisingly, the greatest level of hostility being reported by respondents with few Black or Asian friends. Such a finding supports research carried out elsewhere (cf Linville, 1982; Jackson & Sullivan, 1989) which concluded that individuals tend to project their own views onto friends, particularly if they are unwilling to openly admit to feelings which may be regarded as anti-social.

Whilst more than three-quarters of the sample population believed that Black, white and Asian people are treated differently in Britain, nearly half the respondents also believed that all ethnic groups (including whites) have equal opportunities both in education and in employment.

However, typical comments about why different ethnic groups are treated differentially included:

You hear about thick whites getting jobs in preference to clever blacks.

They are treated as if they were lepers.

Some people have various racial prejudices and if they are in a position of authority it can matter.

White people feel invaded by all different races coming and living in GB and taking their jobs.

Too many people still think twice before employing or socialising with blacks.

Whites are got at for discriminating in their own country and not vice versa.

Coloured people are treated better. Allowed to get away with things because people in charge are afraid of upsetting racial relations.

Respondents in the research study were asked what abilities were typical of Black, white and Asian people and Table 5 provides a breakdown of responses.

Table 5 - What sorts of things are people good at?

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Politics              Sport
Black people       3     Black people         53
Black + White people   8     Black + White people    33
White people       76    Black + Asian people     3
White + Asian people   4     White people         5
Asian people       1     All the same         5
All the same       7
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Music        Talking
Black people       22    Black people         6
Black + White people   32    Black + White people    12
Black + Asian people    3    Black + Asian people     2
White people       23    White people        48
White + Asian people    2    White + Asian people     5
Asian people        2    Asian people         5
All the same       14    All the same        21
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Acting                          Dancing
Black people        1    Black people        40
Black + White people   20    Black + White people    18
White people       58    Black + Asian people     9
White + Asian people    4    White people        12
All the same       15    White + Asian people     2
             Asian people         5
             All the same        12
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Business
Black people       1
Black + White people   3
Black + Asian people   1
White people       40
White + Asian people   25
Asian people       15
All the same       14
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Respondents were clearly able to differentiate between the 'typical' abilities
of Black, Asian and white people, although it should be said that 9 per cent of
respondents left this question unanswered and 17 per cent reported that all
groups were good at everything. Of those respondents who refused to complete
the question, typical comments included:

Every individual in their own race will differ from each other. I don't think
their race has anything to do with what they are good at.

Can't define, each good in their own right.

If given a chance, all can be equal.

Respondents were then asked to attribute specific characteristics to different
ethnic groups and in this case, 16 per cent of respondents left the question
unanswered and 22 per cent reported that all groups had all characteristics. Of
the remaining 62 per cent who did answer the question, Black people were
typified as flashy, violent, lazy and bad-tempered; Asian people as weak,
difficult, bad-tempered and hard-working; and white people as neighbourly,
friendly and kind. Thus, despite the fact that a core minority of respondents
were unwilling to ethnically stereotype groups, the great majority were not so
bashful and, in the main, attributed largely positive characteristics and
abilities to white people, and more negative characteristics to ethnic minority
groups.

Students were also asked a set of specific questions relating to television and in terms of general consumption of programmes, the majority of respondents reported that they watched less than 3 hours of television during weekdays, including 45 per cent who said that they only watched between 1 and 2 hours of television each weekday - weekend viewing tended to be significantly higher with more than a third watching more than 4 hours on Saturdays and Sundays. Most viewers watch for enjoyment (88 per cent) although relaxation (69 per cent) and information (60 per cent) were also important reasons and more than a third of the sample population watched television for educational reasons.

In general, young women tended to prefer soap operas with 62 per cent of this group reporting that Neighbours was their favourite programme: only 28 per cent of young men had similar tastes, with comedy and music programmes being by far the most popular type of programme favoured by the student sample. Current affairs and news programmes were not that popular, although 68 per cent of respondents said that they watched such programmes 'sometimes'. However, the great majority of respondents felt that television is very important (45 per cent) or quite important (47 per cent) in informing them about the world.

Questions were asked relating to knowledge about prominent Black, Asian and white people in a range of occupational areas such as politics, music, news reading and comedy. Most students were able to nominate personalities in the appropriate categories and television was regarded as the first and primary locus of such knowledge. The BBC was reported as being popular, with 60 per cent of respondents stating that they watched this channel 'a lot' and 43 per cent saying that they watched 'a lot' of programmes on ITV (Central). Just less than three-quarters of the student groups thought that television was about real life and/or people like themselves. Comments about the nature of typical programmes included descriptions such as unreal lifestyles, exaggerated, fantasy and middle class.

Nearly three-quarters of respondents believed that the number of appearances of Black and Asian people on television is 'about right' with 16 per cent stating that there were too few and the same number again reporting too many appearances. Of those respondents reporting 'too few' appearances, nearly all had Black and/or Asian friends. Just over a third of respondents believed that television was inaccurate in its portrayal of ethnic minorities and young men were more likely to have this view than young women. When asked about more appropriate ways of representing ethnic minority groups, a majority of respondents thought that they should be characterised as 'ordinary' people.

Table 6 - Preferred ways of representing ethnic minorities on television

	YES
As ordinary people in ordinary situations	70
Living and working with white people	50
As separate and different from white people	13

As far as ethnic characterisations on television are concerned, respondents were asked a series of questions relating to the most usual role types played by Black, white and Asian actors and Table 7 provides a breakdown of responses:

Table 7 - What are the most usual roles that White, Black and Asian people play on television?

Minor roles		Major roles	
Asian	34	Asian	-

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Asian + Black      28    Asian + Black        -
Asian + White       2    Asian + White        -
Black  7      Black  -
Black + White      33    Black + White        3
White           5    White 59
All the same      19    All the same         5
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Table 7 - ...continued

Servant/slave roles   Detective roles

	Servant/slave roles		Detective roles
Asian	7	Asian	1
Asian + Black	38	Asian + Black	-
Asian + White	1	Asian + White	<1
Black	30	Black	4
Black + White	8	Black + White	36
White	4	White	54
All the same	11	All the same	4

Poor roles   Criminal roles

	Poor roles		Criminal roles
Asian	15	Asian	2
Asian + Black	26	Asian + Black	12
Asian + White	3	Asian + White	<1
Black	11	Black	19
Black + White	8	Black + White	32
White	8	White	9
All the same	28	All the same	24

Ordinary roles   Victim roles

	Ordinary roles		Victim roles
Asian	2	Asian	11
Asian + Black	1	Asian + Black	24
Asian + White	4	Asian + White	4
Black	3	Black	6
Black + White	12	Black + White	8
White	37	White	19
All the same	40	All the same	27

Strong roles   Weak roles

	Strong roles		Weak roles
Asian	1	Asian	21
Asian + Black	<1	Asian + Black	6
Asian + White	1	Asian + White	2
Black	14	Black	46
Black + White	45	Black + White	7
White	30	White	5
All the same	7	All the same	12

Rich roles

	Rich roles
Asian	2
Asian + Black	<1
Asian + White	9
Black	2
Black + White	17
White	58
All the same	10

As Table 7 shows, respondents believed that white people were usually assigned
positive roles as strong characters, detectives and leading men and women,
whilst ethnic minority actors were more typically cast in subordinate roles, as
slaves, criminals and poor people. The everyday characteristics which
respondents assigned to ethnic minority groups in society generally closely
matched the stereotypes which they considered were to be found in television

fictions. In the same way that respondents regarded Black people as violent and troublesome in real life, so they saw them in strong and criminal roles on television. Black people were nearly twice as likely to be perceived as habitually playing criminals than their white counterparts and Asian actors were four times less likely to play such roles. The belief that Black people often play slave and/or servant roles is interesting since current programmes which include such roles such as On the up and You rang m'lord, rarely feature Black characters in any role, let alone that of servant. Such (mis)perception, however, has clear implications for the way in which ethnic minority groups are typically regarded, rather than accurately remembered. However, it may be that respondents took a broader view of the slave/servant category and interpreted it to encompass 'servile', since many subordinate roles such as cleaner, caretaker or factory worker are assigned to Black and Asian actors. There is also the obviously traditional perception of Black people in servant roles as propagated through American film dramas such as Gone with the Wind and Uncle Tom's Cabin, as well as the wealth of films set in 'British' India.

The sample population were asked if they thought that television encourages ethnic harmony or makes things worse and a majority (42 per cent) believed that television has an adverse effect on promoting ethnic harmony, although 36 per cent reported that television has a beneficial effect, with 16 per cent believing that television has good and bad effects - 5 per cent of respondents believed that television has no effect.

WATCHING THE BOX

As a complement to the research study's survey of young white consumers of television, an effort was made to ascertain exactly what kind of images were being broadcast and internalised by the viewing public. In September 1989 a monitoring exercise was carried out, whereby as many television programmes were monitored as possible over a four-week period. The aim of this exercise was to identify both the incidence of ethnic minority actors and the roles which they habitually play on television, with a particular focus on the type of programmes which score consistently highly in the network ratings, that is, popular television.

This small study was concerned with the imagery and characterisation of ethnic minority actors and was exclusively directed towards television programmes which had auditioned casts: non-fiction programme were not part of the study. No distinctions were made between British and non-British television and the study did not deal with programmes which were unlikely to include ethnic minority characters, for example, those which had farming or country life themes and those which were historical dramas set in Britain. The study also disregarded feature films which were first broadcast to a cinema audience.

Although as many programmes were watched as possible, bearing in mind the above qualifications, quite obviously it was impossible to watch television all the time. Programme viewing was thus restricted to peak-time viewing, between 1900 hours and 2300 hours, since the programmes broadcast during this time arguably constitute 'popular' television. The only exception to these viewing times was the Australian soap opera Neighbours which consistently achieved the top rating slot on BBC1 during that year. Because it was the most popular programme both nationally and as far as the sample population were concerned, it seemed appropriate that the programme should be included in the study.

During September 1989, the 50 most highly viewed programmes included three soaps - Coronation Street, EastEnders and Neighbours which together claimed the top 36 positions. The remaining 14 positions were taken by comedy (nine positions) and medical drama (quasi-soap - 3 positions) with film and news programmes claiming one position each (BARB, 1989). It must be said that the high viewing figures

for soaps - Coronation Street with 19.78m; Neighbours with 17.4m and EastEnders with 16.52m - are comprised of viewers for a particular weekday programme plus the Saturday and Sunday omnibus editions, in the case of Coronation Street and EastEnders and the combined figures of the twice daily broadcast of Neighbours. For example, in the week ending 5 November 1989, Neighbours held the top five positions in the BBC ratings, followed by EastEnders in 6th and 7th place: the news at 9.00pm came in at position 9. What is interesting about the way in which audience viewing figures are collected is the way in which the practice of aggregation contributes to the greater apparent popularity of some programmes over others. For example, an early evening broadcast of Neighbours attracted an average audience of 11.8m whilst a single programme of the news at 9.00pm had an audience of 12.2m viewers.

During the period of the study, a new series (of a previously broadcast series) of the comedy programme Desmonds was featured on Channel 4. This particular show is set in a barber shop and features an almost exclusively Black cast and for this reason, the programme was not included in the study since it would distort the findings. It was in any case not a particularly high-rated programme, attracting 2.17m viewers for the broadcast in the week ending 5 November 1989 (BARB, 1989).

For the first two weeks of the study, programmes were viewed mostly on BBC1 and Central Television, with the second two weeks concentrating (although not exclusively) on BBC2 and Channel 4. A video recorder was used in those instances where popular programmes overlapped on two channels. A total of 83 programmes were watched, constituting 62 hours of broadcast material, from 16 September to 13 October 1989. A breakdown of programme type is shown below:

Table 8 - Breakdown of programme type watched during the monitoring exercise (per cent)

Soaps 31 (37)
Drama 22 (26)
Comedy   22 (26)
Crime series   8 (10)

For the purposes of this study, the term 'soap' includes all those programmes which are broadcast on a regular basis and usually at least twice per week, and which purport to represent 'real' life. The term 'drama' includes all those programmes, including one-off plays and drama series, which do not fall into any of the other categories. Of the above programmes: 36 per cent were broadcast on BBC1; 8 per cent on BBC2; 46 per cent on Central Television; and 10 per cent on Channel 4. The concentration of programmes shown on BBC1 and Central TV reflects the more fiction-orientated composition of their programme schedules, in contrast with BBC2 and Channel 4 which both tend towards more factual and documentary style programming.

As programmes were watched, notes were made of the number of characters who had speaking parts and the proportion of such characters who were from ethnic minority communities - Table 9 below provides a breakdown of programmes type and the ethnicity of performers within them.

Table 9 - Television programmes and ethnicity

	White	Black	Asian	Other	Total	% of all
Soaps	341	10	5	7	22	6
Drama	255	13	5	–	18	7

Comedy	172	7	–	7	7	4
Crime	85	2	–	2	–	2
Total	853	32	10	7	49	5

It should be noted that the 49 appearances of ethnic minority actors included repeat appearances in regular programmes: there were 35 different characters noted. A total of 902 characters were identified out of which 853 (94.5 per cent) were white, 3.5 per cent were Black, 1 per cent were Asian and 1 per cent were from Turkish, Chinese or other minority groups. As is clear from the Table, 5 per cent of all actors identified in the study were from ethnic minority groups, with drama programmes including the largest proportion of such actors - 7 per cent.

These findings are consistent with those of Anwar and Shang who carried out a similar monitoring study in 1978/79 and a follow-up study in 1982. In their earlier study it was found that 78 per cent of all actors in British-originated programmes were white, the balance being made up of 'West Indians' (5 per cent); Asians (1 per cent); Black Africans (2 per cent); Black Americans (2 per cent); and 12 per cent constituting other ethnic minority groups. The later study showed a decrease in the proportion of ethnic minority performers from 10 per cent to 7 per cent over the three year period (Anwar & Shang, 1982). The authors concluded that many of the characters which minority actors portray are negative in tone and thus perpetuate specific stereotypes.

Unless more ethnic minority actors are cast in everyday situations, those cast in negative roles are likely to feature prominently and thus reinforce existing misconceptions. (Anwar & Shang, 1982, p.104)

In addition to the programmes already identified in Table 9 above, 4 music programmes and 15 game shows were also watched. Of the 31 bands which were featured in music programmes, 45 per cent were either all-Black groups or featured at least one Black band member - there were no Asian groups or group members. Of the 93 game show contestants, 91 (98 per cent) were white with one Asian and one Black contestant. Notwithstanding the actual percentage of Black and Asian characters which featured in the television programmes watched, 35 per cent of programmes included at least one Black or Asian character.

Ethnic roles and characters
The distribution of ethnic minority characters by programme type is shown in Table 10 below

Table 10 – Distribution of ethnic minority actors and programme type

	Number of Programmes	Percentage including minority actors
Soaps	31	47
Drama	22	36
Comedy	22	23
Crime	8	25
Total	31	35 (of all)

As far as the type of characters portrayed by ethnic minority actors is concerned, there were no leading characters: some were support and some were walk-on. As there are relatively few ethnic minority roles to consider, it is perhaps useful to briefly examine some of the characters identified, according to programme genre.

Soaps

EastEnders

During the period of viewing, five ethnic minority actors were featured. Ashraf Karim and his son are Asian and the Karim family own the local grocery shop. During the viewing period, Ashraf Karim and his son Sohail are shown arguing about friendship, where the elder Karim advocates keeping a distance between his family and the white community, whereas Sohail argues that interaction will encourage understanding. Discussing racial themes in this way is a common device utilised in EastEnders. The Karim family are not popular characters in the soap and only featured once in the cast lists in the Radio Times during the four-week viewing period. The Karim family eventually left the series in July 1990, when the arranged marriage of Shareen Karim was called off by the prospective groom's parents because they discovered that Ashraf Karim had been involved in an extra-marital affair: the family were thus forced to move out of the area because of the shame.

The character of Ali Osman has been part of the main cast of EastEnders since the beginning of the series, although during the viewing period the character was effectively written out, with Ali departing from Albert Square accompanied by his Turkish cousins, having lost everything he owned through gambling. His (English) wife, Sue, had already suffered a mental breakdown and his young son had been taken into care. Ali has often been heard to remark that, among other things, his wife's lack of understanding of Turkish culture was a significant factor in the breakdown of their marriage.

The character of Vince is quite a new one in the series and appears to be a replacement for Darren Roberts who was the previous incumbent of the role of criminal Black. Vince had just begun to rent Carmel Roberts' empty flat – Carmel is Darren's sister and casual guardian of his two children. Darren dropped out of the series under a cloud of petty crime and Vince has now replaced him as the person in the series who is most likely to be selling stolen property. During the viewing period, Vince featured in two episodes setting up and running a disco at the local community centre. Like Darren, it has never been made clear what Vince actually does for a living, and it is assumed that he lives on his wits and possibly has something to do with the music business. After a few months, Vince was dropped from the cast, departing in the same vague way as he arrived.

The fifth ethnic minority character to appear in EastEnders during the viewing period was a Chinese school-teacher, but this was a one-off appearance and incidental to the plot line.

Neighbours

The only Black character in Neighbours is Pete Baxter, a young man who works at the local bank and who has hopes of becoming an Olympic athlete. Since his introduction into the series some time ago he has rarely featured. However, during the viewing period, one storyline cast Pete's friends, that is, the rest of the cast of Neighbours, fund-raising to enable Pete to train at the national sports institute. Because of this particular plot-line, Pete featured in 6 episodes of Neighbours which accounted for 27 per cent of all appearances of all minority characters in all soaps. Despite the laudable efforts of the good citizens of Erinsborough in providing Pete with sufficient funds to train at the institute, Pete injures himself because he doesn't want to be told what to do by the (white) teachers, and is expelled from the institute. Subsequently, the storyline exhausted, Pete left town.

Brookside

This soap included three Chinese characters during the viewing period, Michael Choi, his daughter Jessica and his father, Mr Choi Snr. The Michael Choi character probably had the most significant role of all the ethnic minority actors in any of the programmes watched during the viewing period. His character is a doctor in general practice who is romantically involved with a

white career woman. This relationship is the focus of much hostility between Michael and his father since the latter insists that such a cross-cultural relationship can only end in disaster. Michael, on the other hand, plays a thoroughly Anglicised character who wishes to shake off the more restrictive aspects of his traditional culture whilst still maintaining those elements which he considers important. In similar vein to EastEnders, problems of interaction between people of different cultures is rehearsed through the arguments between one generation and another, with the younger characters putting forward the more 'enlightened' view. In one episode, a minor white character is seen talking to an Asian friend. This was a one-off appearance. The Choi family no longer appear in the soap.

Thirtysomething
This American soap featured a Black man and woman in two separate episodes, one cast as a community worker (female) and the other cast as an advertising agency copywriter. Both roles were minor with few lines, but they were essentially unselfconscious, the ethnicity of the actors being incidental to the plot-lines.

Drama
Nice Work
This four-part adaptation of David Lodge's novel was set in an industrial townscape and several scenes took place in a foundry. It was here that the ethnic minority characters were to be seen, all of whom were Asian (4 in total), one of whom was the focus for a walkout when it was discovered that the factory bosses were about to dismiss him for incompetence. The character did not have a substantial speaking part and was only afforded a voice through the intervention of a white female academic.

The Paradise Club
This ten-part series was set in and around a nightclub which had hitherto served as the headquarters of a local family of criminals. One of the gang members is Black and has an undeveloped and minor character role which mainly consists of grunting and looking threatening. The demands of the role do not include any acting ability. In one episode, in a courtroom scene, the clerk of court is played by a Black woman. This was a one-off appearance.

Casualty
This medical series set in the casualty department of a large hospital regularly features a Black female receptionist and a Black male nurse. Both characters are minor but well developed and credible. In one episode two members of the public waiting for friends who have been taken into hospital are played by Black actors.

In a television film and an American hospital drama also watched during the viewing period, a policeman, two doctors and a nurse were played by Black actors.

Comedy
Of the six appearances of ethnic minority actors in comedy series, two appearances were of the same character, a Black female receptionist who is exploited by her white female boss in a typical British situation-comedy format. The series In Sickness and In Health, which is the follow-on from Til Death Us Do Part, features Pele, a Black youth who is often in the series to expose Alf's more lunatic flights of racist fancy. An unusual science fiction series, Red Dwarf, featured two Black space travellers and the comedy series Only Fools and Horses also featured two Black characters in one episode.

Crime
During the viewing period, both The Bill and the American police series, Cagney and Lacey featured Black policewomen.

The characters which were portrayed in the programmes watched during the viewing
period included:

doctor (male - Chinese)
grocer (male - Asian)
possible villain (male - Black)
actual villain (male - Black)
foundry worker (male - Black)
receptionist (female - Black)
court clerk (female - Black)
policewoman (female - Black)
community worker (female - Black)
advertising executive (male - Black)
bank worker (male - Black)

Although there is some diversity of occupation identified above, none of the
characters played leading roles in any programme, none of them portrayed a
strong character or leader and few feature regularly in their respective series
and serials. Many of the characters operate on the periphery of their social
environments, often cast as outsider. Black American characters are much more
integrated into the casting as a whole, whereas ethnic minority characters in
British programmes often appear to be overly aware of their ethnicity which is
often a salient feature of their relations with other characters. Research
undertaken by Barry in 1986 to ascertain whether the three Black myths which she
had identified (trouble-maker, entertainer and dependent) had any currency in
terms of television images, concluded that

...on occasion [the myths] were...traces, but elsewhere they continued to
flourish just beneath the new skin of change. (Barry, 1986, p.101)

Barry states that the most significant aspect to emerge from her research was
the tension between whether Black people should be portrayed positively, as
their best selves, or realistically, as they actually were. The difficulty with
any ethnic minority characterisation is the fact that it is burdened with the
responsibility of representation so that the character can never be explored or
developed for and in itself, but always in relation to her/his skin.

It is clear from this monitoring exercise that the ethnic minority characters
which feature in much of popular television do not reflect the rich diversity of
human experience which is found in the real world. Many of the roles played by
ethnic minority actors are stereotyped, for example, the Black villain, the
Asian shop-keeper, the Black athlete, which simply perpetuate the orthodox
racist imagery which already exists about ethnic difference. Whilst this is not
to say that some Asian families do not run grocery shops or that some Black men
and women are not good athletes, it is argued here that such portrayals in the
absence of any complementary images, tend to represent the entire repertoire of
ethnic minority experience and lifestyle and become regarded as typical and
representative of such communities. If only 5 per cent of television characters
are Black and Asian and those that are featured are villainous, adulterous,
corrupt, poor and weak, then it is likely that, without other and different
experiences of ethnic minority communities, the white viewing public will expect
all members of such communities to be the same and act in similar ways as those
characters they see on their television screens.

IMAGES FOR THE THIRD MILLENIUM

The way in which television treats ethnic issues is a result of deliberate
policy and programme decisions regarding what is included and what is excluded,
who is allowed to speak and who is not, quite apart from the type of language
and imagery employed in television fictions. The crucial problem with

television's portrayal of ethnic communities, at least in popular programming, lies in the burden of representation with which every ethnic role is necessarily imbued. The lack of Black and Asian characters in popular television would not be so significant - the frequency of Black and Asian appearances is roughly in proportion to their number in the population generally - if such roles displayed the full diversity of human experience in everyday life. This is not, however, the case. Where are the strong, positive, leading roles for ethnic minority artists? Where are the Black women challenging traditional male attitudes? Where are the young Asian people surviving the rigours of adolescence in ordinary households? It is the enactment of normal, ordinary, everyday life which is fundamentally missing from popular television fictions, where actors are allowed to act outside their skin rather than in constant reference to it.

Whilst this is certainly not to deny the existence of racism, prejudice and discrimination, such themes need to be introduced into the television text in non-threatening ways and in ways with which the audience can identify. Such identification will only take place, however, if the characters have been carefully drawn and developed, that is, if they are credible and realistic and have an observable integrity. It is argued here that a sensitive treatment of difficult issues [for the white audience] within the relatively safe environment of, say, the soap opera, will have a much greater impact on the conception and understanding of such issues by the predominantly white audience, than any number of documentaries treating with similar themes. This is because firstly, documentaries have a much smaller audience and second, and perhaps more importantly, once the viewer feels defensive and/or uncomfortable, which are feelings often generated by evidence of white racism and discrimination, the message is likely to be lost. Documentary genres which deal with ethnic topics tend either to catalogue empirical evidence of discrimination at the individual or institutional level, or else to describe ethnic catastrophe such as famine or, to celebrate ethnic exotica such as kinship rituals in West Africa with benign and paternalistic enthusiasm. Whatever the subject, ethnic minority groups, by the very fact of constituting a discrete focus for investigation, are set apart as different and other and, in the British context, are often problematised as causing or suffering from social conflict and inequality.

Ethnic programming
Ethnic programming, and particularly that offered by the 'minority' channel, Channel 4, has been unable to fulfil original expectations. Wambu, for example, argues that from their first tentative steps, ethnic minority broadcasting has had difficulty with notions of identity and identification, tending to locate discussions within the conflict model of ethnic relations exclusively, so that programmes have been unable to engage the wider society (Wambu cited in The Listener, 1.6.1989). Zia Mohyeddin, Executive Producer of Central Television's Here and Now Asian arts magazine, argues that although his programme may be about minority cultures, it is not orientated towards an exclusively Asian or Black audience. The programme has been running for 10 years and has viewing figures of approximately one million. Mohyeddin comments that:

Although we try to promote the programme as a straightforward cultural/arts programme, immediately the ethnicity of the participants is seen, people perhaps think, 'Oh, it's them again', and switch off. That's the sort of perception that needs to change, to get people to stop saying that this or that person is one of them and not one of us. (Mohyeddin, 1989)

However, in defence of the charge that Channel 4 has failed to take on a specific Black identity in its flagship series Bandung File, Farrukh Dhondy, Commissioning Editor for Multi-Cultural Programming at Channel 4 states that:

...once you get used to the idea that blacks are a permanent part of the British population you will have to get used to the fact that we are going to be doing mainstream programming. (Dhondy, cited in The Listener, 8.7.1988)

Channel 4 has recently begun broadcasting an Asian soap opera Family Pride which describes the life of a successful Asian business with all the attendant problems which beset many businesses, such as corruption, unreliable suppliers and difficult industrial relations. Whilst the idea of an 'ethnic' soap is workable in principle, the outcomes are not always predictable since, like other 'ethnic' programmes, it is invested with an inappropriate burden of representation. In the absence of other programmes describing Asian business life and in the absence of any primary experience to the contrary, the white audience could imagine that all Asian businesses are like that and that all Asian individuals are like those seen in the series. Although this is not to argue that such business practices do not go on in Asian as in every other type of business, it is simply that for the white audience, there are numerous counter-examples on television and in real life, of business organisations which do not, explicitly at least, exhibit such short-comings. The white audience knows that for every white adulterer they see on their screens, there are any number of faithful men and women; for every white embezzler, there are a thousand trusted employees. The point is that for the white viewer, s/he knows about other white people through personal, first-hand experience as well as via media sources. S/he knows that the white deviant personality is not the norm, that most white people are law-abiding, child-loving, kind and caring individuals. S/he knows rather less, however, about ethnic minority communities and must rely much more on secondary experiences, most often vicariously derived from television.

Conclusions
Given the primacy of television in our social and cultural life, what images are reflected through the dramatic and comedic portraits of ethnic characters in popular programming? What roles are cast for ethnic actors and what are the perceptions of these roles from the view of the white viewing public? In the main, ethnic representations on television conform closely to the perceptions that the white majority hold about ethnic populations in the real world. Perceptions of Black criminality and Asian victimisation are regularly rehearsed through the medium of television where ethnic actors are rarely seen as ordinary, normal people, involved in ordinary, normal activities. Instead, the ethnicity of Black and Asian characters is always delineated, their essential differentness to other cast members is a constant reference point. Ethnic actors are rarely allowed to act outside their skin, to break out of the traditional roles accorded them by white writers and white producers and expected of them by the white audience.

Whilst it may be that, as the media professionals who took part in the study enthusiastically suggested, ethnic representations are 'better' now than at any time in the past, it still does not mean that writers and producers can afford to be complacent. A new drama series about the part-time special police force Specials (BBC1) dealt with ethnicity in its first broadcast, where a special constable was accused of 'identifying too closely with her own kind' - she is Asian - when she tries to do a deal on behalf of a hapless Asian youth. In response to the suggestion that this [robbery] is an ethnic business, the special constable replies 'Well I'm an ethnic too', which seems to be a quite astonishing self-description.

How then does television operate on the attitudes and behaviour of the viewing public? It is highly unlikely that many young college students will have had first-hand experience of trying to find a job, and yet many of these students reported in discussions that 'all the jobs go to blacks'. Where does this perception come from? Why do these students believe that multi-ethnic neighbourhoods encourage house prices to fall, or that there is an imminent danger of invasion by 'black' immigrants? It is suggested here that these perceptions are gained, to a very large extent, from the way in which ethnicity - that is, the problem of Black and Asian people - is treated on television, and

the role that television therefore plays in the reproduction and maintenance of stereotypical beliefs of ethnic minority communities, which serve to define, in the absence of first-hand experience, the reality of the 'black' experience to the white viewing audience. Television's continued focus on the problematic aspects of our multi-ethnic society reinforces many of the traditional stereotypical assumptions about ethnic minority communities which are embedded in the cultural repertoire of the white majority. The medium of television is acknowledged as a powerful transmitter of information and a highly popular entertainment with the potential of challenging and changing perceptions and behaviour, so what contribution can it make towards the promotion of equality, both of opportunity and treatment, in the twenty-first century?

Given that the majority of ethnic minority characterisations in popular fictions are stereotypical in form and content, offering no challenge to the traditional perceptions and assumptions of the white majority audience, it is obvious that such imagery must be changed if television is firstly to more accurately portray social life as it exists and as it is lived; second, to provide a service to all its viewers, black and white; and third, to promote equality for all Britain's communities. One step forward is through the device of integrated casting, where writers create roles and develop characters which have no ethnic fixity. Ansorge at Channel 4 identifies the soap, 'Brookside' as a good example of how such a device can work well. He discusses why the Chinese family in the series failed, but how the casting of Louis Emerick as Mick Johnson has been much more successful.

Well, the Chinese family is an interesting example, because everyone is in agreement that it didn't really work out, partly because they were put in with an awareness of the criticism in certain quarters that Brookside wasn't very ethnic. That's a case where they sat down and artificially introduced a Chinese family in this instance and I think that the audience will spot in the end that artificiality. Whereas with Mick and his family, Mick just arrived as a character in the series...and they just cast him black, it wasn't actually written in as that. He worked as a character and then the writers decided to build up his part and to introduce his family, to actually bring them to the 'Close' and that worked much better because you feel that somehow that's natural. He's a character as any other and that's the way to do it. (Ansorge, 1990)

A greater diversity of credible and realistic roles for ethnic minority actors is vital, coupled with deliberate support strategies for nurturing Black and Asian talent from behind the camera as well as in front of it. But as Ansorge readily admits, the impetus for change has to come from the industry and that means the industry itself must want to change and must be willing to take action to effect changes in policy and practice

Such change is happening, but slowly and piece-meal. Both Channel 4 and the BBC have initiated strategies aimed at encouraging Black and Asian individuals to enter the industry, including running special training programmes as positive action initiatives. In 1990, the BBC and Project Fullemploy jointly sponsored a writers' workshop aimed at getting ethnic minority comedy writers into the industry and in September 1991, the BBC were actively recruiting in the national press for a Black or Asian candidate to take up a training attachment with Radio 1 as part of BBC Radio's 'Positive Action Programme'. Such initiatives are obviously welcome but what is of equal importance is a recognition of the extent to which ethnic minority characters are routinely stereotyped and the initiation of a positive strategy to combat the overly negative characterisation of ethnic minority groups in favour of more credible and more diverse, if not necessarily positive, roles for Black and Asian performers. If television is to reflect the social life of its society, then account needs to be taken of the multicultural nature of that society and if television is to educate its audience, as well as inform and entertain them, it needs to confront and treat with social issues in

positive ways, rather than reproducing and maintaining the comfortable
prejudices of the majority. Nearly a decade on, the comments of Equity's
General Secretary are still being largely ignored.

The beneficial effects of the regular and unselfconscious casting of Afro-Asian
artists in non-racially-defined parts would make a tremendous contribution
towards the establishment and maintenance of racial harmony in what is now a
multi-racial country. (Peter Plouviez, then General Secretary of Equity, quoted
in the Daily Telegraph, 7.3.1983)

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