



Representation and portrayal of audiences on BBC television

Research report

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Executive summary

Summary

- The representation and portrayal of diverse audiences on TV – both in general and on the BBC in particular – was considered to have improved over recent years, but there is more that can be done.
- Channel 4 and Netflix were held up as good providers of wide representation and authentic portrayal, although BBC Three was also praised. The BBC was widely considered to have a White, middle class, South East bias.
- The representation of older women was considered restricted to just a few roles across a limited range of genres.
- People from lower socio-economic backgrounds felt they are often portrayed in narrow and negative ways.
- Many minority groups feel misunderstood, stigmatised or simply overlooked by society in general, and notice this reflected on TV.
- People were generally sensitive to representation that feels tokenistic and portrayal that perpetuates stereotypes or focuses on aspects of identity that highlight difference.
- Improvements could come from greater frequency of representation on TV, which would allow more diversity of portrayal, as well as from both incidental and landmark portrayal.

Introduction

This large qualitative study, which formed part of a wider review, was conducted to gain audience insights into the importance of representation and portrayal on TV, and to explore how well audiences perceive the BBC to be performing compared with other broadcasters.

The research comprised a mix of approaches tailored to the varied audiences. The fieldwork was conducted in May and June 2018 among a demographically and geographically diverse range of participants spread around the UK, including people from ethnic minority backgrounds, people who identified as LGBT and disabled people.

The findings from this study are largely consistent with previous research but provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding.

The TV viewing context

People's TV viewing habits affect their exposure to diversity on TV and their perceptions of representation and portrayal. Viewing patterns are changing with shifts in technology, which

are opening up wider choice and allowing greater control, but also potentially reducing exposure to diverse representation and portrayal.

The importance of representation and portrayal on TV

Nevertheless, the representation and portrayal of people and places was generally considered to be important by all research participants, although it was more top-of-mind among those who feel in some way marginalised – which tended to be the case among people from minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT people, people who identified as more severely disabled, and people of lower socio-economic grades.

We found that TV can play a powerful role in reflecting and shaping viewers' perceptions of the world. It can perform as a mirror, reflecting audiences' lives and experiences back at them in a way they can relate to, which can provide validation and reassurance. It can also act as a window – which gives views in two directions – through which audiences can see and learn about other people, as well as providing visibility to others so that different people are seen and understood. TV also provides role models, which was considered particularly important by some minority groups who felt TV could help address ignorance and negative perceptions.

Representation and portrayal relate not just to the people and places that appear on TV, but also to how they come across to the audience. Some participants observed a tendency for TV to make a mere nod towards diversity – having, for example, 'just the one' person from a minority ethnic background on a panel discussion – which can feel like a box-ticking exercise rather than an embrace of diversity. Audiences want portrayal to feel authentic – showing people that feel real and rounded rather than clichéd or belittled – and for all walks of life to be represented.

Delivering diverse representation and portrayal

The research identified four areas that contribute in viewers' minds to successful representation and portrayal.

- **Incidental portrayal** – diverse portrayal is preferred when it is incidental because this steers away from drawing attention to difference, stereotyping and marginalisation.
- **Landmark portrayal** – many audiences, especially those in minority groups, are also fond of programming that is about them and made for them, in which they feel richly and authentically portrayed.
- **Frequency of representation** – greater incidence of representation spreads the representational burden and allows more variety of portrayal.
- **Off-screen diversity** – the identity of the writers, editors and producers can influence the people, characters and narratives shown on TV, while the richer understanding of minority and marginalised groups can feed through in the nuances of portrayal.

Overall, peoples' perceptions are that on-screen diversity has improved over the years but there is still room for improvement. More representation is required of people from minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT people, disabled people, and women aged 55+, as well as of nations and regions beyond the UK's major cities. Minority audiences want to see a greater

variety of portrayal across genres that overcome tokenism, avoid stereotyping and increase incidental portrayal.

Expectations vary by genre

Popular programmes carry more weight of responsibility because of their larger audiences, although the onus is not spread evenly across genres. Expectations of representation and portrayal can vary. Soaps and other long running dramas such as EastEnders, Emmerdale, Coronation Street and Casualty, for example, can be rich territory for diverse representation and portrayal, but sometimes dramas can sweep up viewers in their narrative and erase identity difference, allowing the demands of representation and portrayal to be overlooked for entertainment. Comedy can powerfully explore identity and expose tensions, allowing portrayal boundaries to be pushed if the underlying sentiment feels authentic. In contrast, more 'serious' genres such as current affairs carry high expectations of balanced representation and authentic portrayal. Tokenism and limited representation are considered noticeable on panel, quiz and lifestyle shows.

The BBC's performance

The BBC's unique status as both a licence-fee funded public service broadcaster and a national institution means audiences hold high expectations of the BBC in representing the lives of people in the UK and providing balanced and positive portrayal.

This research found that the BBC is widely perceived to be a bastion of establishment power, with the bias of a white, middle class, London/South East lens, which can influence perceptions of its performance and lead some to judge it harshly. Moreover, audiences do not always remember who provided the programmes they watch, especially when content shifts between channels and platforms. Nevertheless, the participants in this research offered numerous examples of programmes from the BBC, as well as competitors, that exhibit nuanced and authentic portrayal.

The research found that, with the exception of BBC Three, the BBC's channels are largely undifferentiated in terms of perceptions of their delivery of representation and portrayal. BBC Three stands out as a champion of diversity. It is considered to show a wide array of people and themes in its programming – although its shift to online-only was not well received by some of the younger, lower SEG and minority ethnic participants, who interpreted the move as representing a dismissive attitude towards diversity.

Many of the participants in this research – particularly the younger ones – believed the BBC should look to competitors such as Channel 4 and Netflix for inspiration as they were felt to provide a wide choice of sophisticated content (notably US 'box set' drama series) in which diverse representation and portrayal is embedded and multi-layered.

Overall, the research found that audiences feel the BBC, along with other broadcasters, has scope to demonstrate a better understanding of the nuances of different audiences in order to improve the representation and portrayal of the UK's diverse audiences on TV.

Background, objectives and research approach

Background, aim and objectives

This research is part of a wider review conducted by Ofcom to examine how the BBC reflects and portrays the whole of UK society on television. The findings will provide a baseline for assessing the BBC's future performance and will help identify where the BBC can do more.

The overall objectives for this qualitative study were to understand the importance and meaning of representation and portrayal to different audiences, and to explore how well BBC TV is perceived to be performing.

The fieldwork was spread across the UK and comprised a combination of multi-moderator workshops, group discussions, triads¹ and depth interviews² with 312 people. It was conducted across May and June 2018. The sample included dedicated sessions with people from minority ethnic backgrounds, people who identified as Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual or Transgender (LGBT) and disabled people.

Previous Ofcom research has indicated that the audiences mentioned above – as well as women aged over 55, those in lower socio-economic groups (SEG³), men aged 18-34, and people in the nations and regions outside South East England – are less satisfied with representation and portrayal on BBC TV. These considerations helped inform the design of the research approach and sample specifications.

The findings from this study are largely consistent with previous research⁴ but provide a more detailed and nuanced understanding.

The verbatims throughout the report are faithful to the recorded manuscript. The grammar and expression have not been corrected.

Research approach

The fieldwork was spread across the UK with some matching of moderator gender/ethnicity to sessions to aid the research process. It comprised a combination of multi-moderator workshops with break-out groups, group discussions, triad mini-groups and in-home interviews. Two pilot sessions were conducted in London on 18 April. The rest of the fieldwork was conducted from 3rd May to 12th June 2018. More details on the sample can be found in Appendix A.

¹ A 'triad' is smaller than a conventional group discussion and typically consists of three, rather than the usual eight, participants of a group discussion

² An individual face-to-face interview

³ Lower SEG is C2, D and E. Socio-economic grade is a system of [demographic classification](#) frequently used in market research in the UK. ABC1 represents the middle classes, C2 represents skilled working class, D working class and E non-working

⁴ Ipsos MORI, June 2017, [BBC Distinctiveness](#)

Section 1: Contextual factors

This chapter explores factors that influence perceptions of representation and portrayal on television in the UK, the role of television, and the factors that influence perceptions of the BBC's performance within this context. These factors are important to bear in mind when reading each of the chapters within this report.

Factors affecting the saliency of representation and portrayal issues

Representation (i.e. who appears on screen) and portrayal (i.e. the way people are presented) is generally considered to have been improving over recent years. Attitudes towards representation and portrayal are explored in the chapters linked to this report.

“TV has taken a more diverse approach in recent years. There are many cultures and nationalities presented by very diverse presenters. Skin colour is becoming less important: it's the qualities they bring that counts” (female 35-44 BC1 Glasgow)

However, for many of the participants from all backgrounds, TV is used simply for entertainment, relaxation, escapism, information, companionship and social currency. Issues of on-screen representation and portrayal might not be top of mind and might not even have been considered before.

The subject of representation and portrayal tended to be more top-of-mind among those who have experienced marginalisation. This was notably the case among people from minority ethnic backgrounds, LGBT people, disabled people, and some people of lower socio-economic grade, as well as people who have a close association with someone who shares these characteristics.

However, people were more attuned to representation and portrayal issues where the tension of dissatisfaction was greater. In contrast, white older men of higher SEG, in London and in affluent areas, tended not to have issues of representation and portrayal on their radar.

Viewing behaviours are changing with technological developments. Viewing habits also affect peoples' level of exposure to diversity and thereby influence their perceptions of representation and portrayal on television. Multiple channel and platform access is widening the availability of content, with increased usage of on-demand services such as Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Now TV. Younger people are increasingly bingeing on SVOD box set dramas at the expense of linear TV. On top of this, content now shifts between channels and platforms, which is weakening the attribution to a broadcaster. While the research found that perception of diverse representation and portrayal is improving – which is explored in more detail in the subsequent chapters – exposure to diverse representation and portrayal is potentially being missed across all services.

“I could watch only programmes with old men in, or decide not to watch any programmes which has coloured people in or gay people in. So you can, even though there are all

sorts of people in there, in a way you can create your own television experience which excludes a hell of a lot, which is dangerous in itself” (male 55+ Dumfries)

Nevertheless, it seems that seeing a small number of high profile individuals on television can mask deficiencies. For example, seeing presenters such as Mary Berry and Ian Wright on popular programmes led some to believe older women and people from minority ethnic backgrounds are represented well – views that are not always shared by those audiences themselves.

We also found that attitudes towards the representation and portrayal of diverse audiences on TV are influenced by people’s sense of identity, which can be multi-layered and complex.

“We are a triple minority, because we are Black, we are Muslim, and we are female. You have all the issues you face as a woman, plus I’m a Black woman, which means double the barriers and discrimination. Then on top of that, I wear a hijab and am Muslim” (female 55+ Birmingham)

Participants tended to relate to a wide range of identity characteristics on TV. They related to ordinary people and social dynamics, as well as those who are funny, caring or misfits. They also related to more idealised, inspirational and aspirational qualities: strength, confidence, success and expertise, as well as rebellion. Many expressed a desire to see more providers draw from this wide range of characteristics to deliver diverse and authentic portrayal.

The role of television in relation to representation and portrayal

We found that TV can play a powerful role in reflecting and shaping viewers’ perceptions of the world, providing a sense of ourselves and others – and so carrying a great responsibility in the way it represents and portrays people. Fear and ignorance can spread when portrayal in particular goes wrong. In effect, TV can perform like a mirror or a window.

- **TV as a mirror** – it can hold up a mirror to viewers, reflecting their lives and experiences, showing them people they can relate to, and providing a sense of identification and inclusion.
- **TV as a window** – it can also work like a window, with views in two directions, revealing other people to us and also providing visibility of ourselves to others, which can encourage mutual understanding and break down barriers.

While many participants felt aspects of their identity should sometimes attract the spotlight, those who feel under-represented (especially minority ethnic groups, LGBT and disabled people) were sensitive to what they felt was tokenistic representation and portrayal. Generally, participants disliked what they thought of as ‘box-ticking’ quotas being applied to programming: for example, having only one woman or one person from a minority ethnic group present on a panel in a programme. Many participants reported finding this disheartening and patronising, although there was some recognition of certain characteristics being under-represented on TV and general agreement that this should be addressed.

The research identified four areas where representation and portrayal were felt to be more authentic.

- **Incidental portrayal** – diverse portrayal in general programming is preferred when it appears to occur by chance or without calling attention to a particular characteristic. This is because it steers away from stereotyping and the perpetuation of ‘otherness’.
- **Landmark portrayal** – at the same time, many participants from all kinds of backgrounds, particularly those who live in areas that can feel overlooked and people who feel marginalised in wider society are also fond of programming ‘made for us’ in which they feel richly portrayed
- **Frequency of representation** – greater incidence of representation allows more variety of portrayal, which is particularly important for participants who feel marginalised and who might also feel stigmatised by poor portrayal. This is also true for older women who can feel overlooked. Clichés and negative tropes can become less annoying because they carry less representational weight. Quantity also increases visibility and has a normalising effect
- **Off-screen diversity** – those who feel marginalised believe diverse on-screen portrayal requires diversity off-screen. The identity of the writers, editors and producers matters because they feel it can influence the people, characters and narratives that appear on TV. A richer understanding of and interest in minority and marginalised groups can make a difference to the nuances of portrayal

“I feel like when you look at like really high-quality shows... nine out of ten times when it is a diverse writing room the content is way way better. It is funnier. It is way more considerate, because you just get all these different perspectives like. So I feel that creates a better product” (male 18-34 gay London)

Representation and portrayal across genres

Popular programmes carry more weight of responsibility because of their larger audiences, although the onus is not spread evenly across genres and expectations relating to representation and portrayal can vary.

- **Soaps & dramas** – were felt to be a rich territory for diverse representation and portrayal, especially big soaps and popular dramas, which provide visibility, tackle difficult issues, and help inform and educate others. However, they carry the risk of tokenistic, stereotyped and extreme portrayal when the pressure for dramatic storylines causes lapses in credibility. Audiences also felt that there is a tendency to focus on large cities at the expense of regional and rural places. Nevertheless, dramas can sweep up viewers in their narrative and erase identity difference, allowing the demands of representation and portrayal to be overlooked for great entertainment
- **Lifestyle entertainment** – lifestyle programmes such as home improvement and cookery shows were generally seen as an area that could be more diverse. For many, it

is considered a bastion of traditional White establishment values, although with the risk of obvious tokenism/box-ticking in the attempt to address this

- **Documentaries, current affairs & news** – there were high expectations of balanced representation and authentic portrayal in documentaries and analysis pieces, which participants felt risk being voyeuristic, patronising or exploitative in the attention they sometimes place on particular groups. Audiences felt that presenters should be selected on merit, although there was some desire for better representation for specific minority groups. The research found that all parts of the UK can feel overlooked or, when under the spotlight, can be associated only with negative topics such as crime. Notably, there was some sensitivity in Northern Ireland about divisive (mis)representation of the Troubles and dwelling on the past.
- **Sitcoms & comedy sketches** – audiences felt that comedy has the power to explore identity and expose tensions, although it can also exploit them. The acceptability of the humour depends on audience expectations and striking a balance between being insightful versus insulting – which depends on who owns the laughs. We found that there is permission to push portrayal boundaries and play with stereotypes if the underlying sentiment feels authentic – which is more likely in content made 'by us for us' – although there was strong sensitivity about the portrayal of religion (especially Islam) among some people from minority ethnic backgrounds
- **Panel, quiz & chat shows** – panel shows, in particular, were perceived to suffer limited representation, seen as predominantly white and male and tending to the tokenistic inclusion of "just the one" female or minority ethnic person. Chat shows can feel more diverse, in both presenters and guests, with Graham Norton often cited as an LGB trailblazer.
- **Reality shows** – there was some discomfort about the perceived exploitation of identity stereotypes on the basis of social class and region or nation, and that poverty can be treated as a source of entertainment. This was keenly felt by some participants in lower SEG communities.
- **Sport** – audiences felt that there could be more diverse representation, and while the high visibility of a few minority ethnic pundits on *Match Of The Day* (BBC One) represents progress for some, for others it can feel like tokenism. A contentious subject across the research was improving female representation across sports. While the bar was considered higher for women presenting and commentating in sport shows, a minority of men were resistant to what they considered the female infiltration of the traditionally male preserve of football. In addition, coverage of national/regional sport, such as Rugby League, was perceived to be overlooked or relegated to very late hours in the TV schedule.

These areas will be covered in more detail in the following chapters.

Factors that influence perceptions of the BBC's delivery of representation and portrayal

Individual broadcasters and content creators are rarely judged in a vacuum because representation and portrayal are delivered across many providers, and viewers do not always remember who provided the programmes they watch. Participants drew programme examples from a range of providers (which they did not always correctly attribute, and which are included to illustrate points in this report). Audiences tend not to think about the provider when selecting content using an electronic programme guide, unless streaming content from a provider such as Netflix or Amazon. Furthermore, content now shifts between channels and platforms, weakening the association between content and broadcaster.

Importantly, the BBC's unique status as a national institution and a licence-fee funded public service broadcaster means audiences have high expectations of the BBC in representing the lives of the people in the UK and providing balanced and positive portrayal.

"I think they need to do a better job at representing people if they are going to force us to pay money [for the licence]" (female 18-34 C2D Black African)

Undermining these high expectations was a widely held perception of the BBC as being establishment, stiff, white, middle-class and politically correct. This contrasted with more modern, edgy and diverse competitors such as Channel 4 and Netflix. For some, particularly minority ethnic groups, the BBC can seem less relevant.

BBC One is well known for delivering good quality dramas, documentaries and soaps, whereas BBC Three was said to feel more inclusive and diverse in its approach but was less well known. Few amongst this research sample were aware of BBC Three moving online.

Section 2: People from a Minority Ethnic Background

Summary

This research included participants from South Asian, Black African and Black African Caribbean backgrounds. Separate group discussions were held with different minority ethnic groups and participants from minority ethnic backgrounds were also included in the main module of research.

It was generally recognised that improvements in representation and portrayal on television have been made over the years. Yet, many of these participants felt misunderstood, stigmatised or simply overlooked by society in the UK, and felt this was reflected on television. The sense that representation and portrayal of minority groups needed to be improved was supported by White participants across the research.

When people in minority ethnic groups appear on television in the UK, as presenters, celebrity guests or in character roles, it can feel tokenistic, and apart from a few exceptions character roles are usually deemed superficial, peripheral and limited. In addition, different religions were felt to be poorly represented and for older Black African Caribbean Christian women the religious programmes featuring Christianity did not reflect their style of worship.

There were also deficiencies highlighted in relation to portrayal, with concerns about the use of outdated and negative stereotypes. There were also concerns, particularly among non-Muslim South Asians, about the lack of differentiation between religions and South Asian ethnicities.

Some participants wanted television to do more to uphold traditional family values and were disapproving of depictions of sexual orientation and sexuality that clashed with their values, especially those based on religious beliefs. However, conversely, younger generations wanted to see the portrayal of less traditional South Asian families.

Some Black presenters can seem constrained in terms of how they appear on television and present themselves, and some Black African men reported feeling uncomfortable when celebrity guests from a minority ethnic background appear to be disrespected on comedy panel shows.

Minority ethnic participants turned to a wide range of providers for content, including SVOD services, US shows and specialist providers of ethnic content such as Asian networks, to access cultural connection through content that feels richer and more authentic in its portrayal. The BBC tended to be regarded as being establishment, white, middle class and risk-averse compared to other providers such as Channel 4 and Netflix.

BBC Three was praised for being more inclusive and diverse compared with other BBC channels. However, moving BBC Three online was seen by some as potentially narrowing its audience reach and consequently interpreted by these BBC Three audiences as a sign of low commitment to broadcasting diverse content.

Introduction

This module of the research included a range of people from South Asian, Black African and Black African Caribbean backgrounds. Although they had some common views, stemming from a shared sense of marginalisation, there were also important differences.

People from minority ethnic backgrounds often expressed a heightened sensitivity to representation and portrayal on television, which arises from the perceived historic and current marginalisation of minority ethnic groups within wider society. Consequently, many of our participants wanted TV to reflect reality and not be over-simplistic in its portrayal of their identities.

“We are a triple minority because we’re Black, we’re Muslim and we are female. You have all the issues you face as a woman, which means double the barriers and discrimination. Then on top of that I wear a hijab and am Muslim” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

We found that gender was an important layer of identity. Women tended to have broad frames of reference – for example, like most women across the research, they could relate to strong female characters on TV regardless of ethnicity. Some men, however, approached representation and portrayal through the more restricted lenses of ethnicity and masculinity. Younger Black African Caribbean men, and especially those of a lower socio-economic grade, tended to feel a greater sense of marginalisation and were more vocal in their desire for improved representation and portrayal of young Black men on TV. They complained that negative stereotypes spread by the media can impact day-to-day life.

“It’s way important because again it [how people see you] can dictate your mood. It can dictate how you’re approached. It can dictate how people view you. And that can all have a huge effect on your day” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

“I think as Black people in general we’re sort of like playing catch up to some of the world” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Religion can also be a strong layer of identity, particularly among South Asian Muslims.

“Where we were born and our roots and everything – we are Muslims and we have to do our religion as well, and we are not going to harm anybody by that or make anybody uncomfortable or anything like that... At the end of the day we are all Muslims” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

“I almost feel like first thing I do when I meet people is make a point of letting them know that I am Hindu and I am not a [Muslim]” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

The powerful role of representation & portrayal on television

While many minority ethnic participants considered issues of representation and portrayal important, some (particularly older participants) simply wanted TV to provide entertainment, relaxation and escapism. Consequently, these participants tended to be more accepting of the status quo.

“Life is hard enough. You just want to come home, switch on the TV and forget about things” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

As previously noted, TV can hold up a mirror to viewers to reflect their world, connecting people from minority ethnic backgrounds with their cultural roots and informing a sense of self-identity, which can be empowering. TV also has the power and responsibility to help the outside world understand people by providing a window for others to see into their world, allowing them to understand the unfamiliar. Thus, it can challenge stereotypes, build understanding, and break down barriers across society.

Many of the participants in this module felt misunderstood, stigmatised or simply overlooked by wider society and consequently had heightened sensitivity about how they are perceived by others, as well as what they see of themselves on TV. Their representation and portrayal were important to them in several ways.

Identification

Many participants spoke of being drawn to programmes simply because they contained a relatable minority ethnic individual.

“He [Guz Khan in Man Like Mobeen, BBC Three] represents my point of view of me as a young Muslim, he gives me a voice” (male 18-34 South Asian Glasgow)

Role models

Successful individuals act as role models and can be a source of pride (especially among Muslims and younger Black African Caribbean participants), yet there was a general sense that high achievers from minority ethnic groups are lacking a presence on TV. Nevertheless, role models need not be based just on ethnicity, as illustrated in the first comment below, which relates to age and gender.

“You feel a sense of achievement because you're looking at them thinking, you're older than me and you can do those things. So, it makes you relate, it makes you place yourself, if that makes sense” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

“I say it's important because we need role models, especially for Black women. There are no positive Black female role models for the young girls to look up to. If young people see that they can aspire to that, they can actually apply for that job, because sometimes when young people are growing up, especially Black young women, they only see certain roles that they can actually apply for or they feel I probably won't get through to be a presenter or anything like that. So, they stick to certain roles like law and hospitals, you know, or teaching” (female 55+ Black African Caribbean Nottingham)

“[The Great British] Bake Off was all about just baking. It was absolutely brilliant. I felt proud. And she [Nadiya] baked for the Queen – like who could say that, you know? And she kept her identity, she is still the same” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

Social cohesion

TV can provide wider society with a sense of who minority groups are, either challenging or reinforcing stereotypes, which influences social relations.

Perceived deficiencies in the representation of minority ethnic people on television

Many people from minority ethnic backgrounds did not feel adequately represented on the programmes that interest them. Although there are some exceptions – such as the perceived increasing presence of South Asian reporters in news – generally participants struggled to name minority ethnic people and characters on British TV with whom they could identify. In the main, portrayal was still felt to be inaccurate and not reflective of real-life diversity in the UK.

“In Casualty you have one Black consultant and one nurse. But this does not reflect the NHS. You walk into the NHS hospital, it is very diverse, yet on TV it is still looks like we are a minority there” (female 55+ Black African Caribbean Nottingham)

“Apart from Ian Wright, I literally cannot think of one high profile Black male character or presenter on TV” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“Yeah I think they should [include Asians on TV] because that’s an equal representation of what society is now. It’s not just a white-faced society we live in. We live with Blacks, Asians, Chinese and Asians all mixed together. So it should be; it should be well represented” (female 35-54 South Asian Glasgow)

“Nowadays on BBC you are getting a lot of Asian journalists, you know, reporters sort of thing – before you wasn’t” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

Two further examples illustrate the point. An older Black African Caribbean female participant complained of the lack of a ‘Black perspective’ on shows she likes to watch, such as *Loose Women* (ITV); and several South Asian women enthused about their love of cookery shows but could not find South Asian cooking programmes on UK free-to-air TV.

Other perceived deficiencies in relation to the representation of minority ethnic people on television include:

Lack of Black presenters

Many Black African and Black African Caribbean participants claimed there are very few Black presenters on TV.

Constrained Black presenters

There was dissatisfaction among Black African and Black African Caribbean men and women about Black presenters seeming to be inauthentic to them, as if in a BBC straitjacket. Examples given were of sports pundit Ian Wright and BBC newsreader Clive Myrie – as elaborated in the quotes below – as well as female news presenters having straightened hair to conform to a perceived ‘BBC look’. With the perception of there being so few of these

presenters on TV, participants acknowledged a tension in the weight of responsibility on each one to be respectable and positively represent their ethnicity to the wider world. Some expressed the view that if there were a greater quantity and variety of personalities and portrayal on offer there would be less criticism of individual examples.

“He [Clive Myrie] always looks to me like he is constrained by what he has to do, whereas when you look at a lot of the other newsreaders, although you know they are constrained, it somehow doesn’t come across that way” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“You wouldn’t want Clive Myrie, behaving the way he normally does, on TV. He’s one of the only Black men up there, so he’s got to behave respectable” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“I’m pretty sure he [Ian Wright] could bring more of his life into delivering the ‘sports news’ in Match of the Day. There’s more that he could do if he was given the parameters to do it. On social media and things like that, when you just see him in his element... It’s something that I can relate to” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

Lack of religious programming

Some of the older Black African Caribbean Christian women lamented the lack of religious programming on TV that they could relate to. They argued that *Songs of Praise* (BBC One) does not reflect their style of Christian worship, leaving them feeling their faith is not represented.

‘Just the one’ tokenism

When people from minority ethnic backgrounds do appear some participants observed a tendency for TV to make a nod towards diversity rather than embrace it. They remarked that soaps, chat shows, lifestyle and panel shows, such as *The One Show* (BBC One), *Question Time* (BBC One) and *Celebrity Juice* (ITV2), often have a token minority ethnic person in a role that can feel superficial, peripheral or limited. Across the research this was contrasted with US shows that rarely have such a limited version of diversity.

“Question Time is normally a bunch of Caucasian people on there with maybe a token person on there to argue the case. The One Show the same thing; the news – it’s all the same” (female 18-34 Black African London)

“If I’m watching a women’s talk show on BET, they would all be from different ethnic backgrounds – one panellist who is Black, another that is Asian, one that’s Black Latin American etc” (female 55+ Black African Caribbean Nottingham)

“Just because there are more it doesn’t mean that it’s getting better. I feel it’s all this quota system thing. Because, you know, you have got to have a representation from this group, this group and this group and I think that is, it is the organisations ticking the boxes that you need to tick... It makes you wonder if they are there on merit or whatever” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

Balance of representation

Some of the older and more affluent South Asian participants worried that attempts to address perceived deficiencies in the representation of minority ethnic might result in “too much” representation on TV. This reflected an expressed desire to be assimilated in wider society. They worried that standing out might jeopardise community relations and cause resentment by giving an inflated impression of the minority group’s size in the population and a sense that they might be receiving special treatment.

“I work in Corby where there are very few Asians. I worked there 22 years and I’ve seen it change over the year. There’s a lot of resentment building up with foreign workers coming in... and the white people see things like [increased diverse representation and portrayal on TV] and they say ‘they have bloody taken over our country’. You know, you hear comments like that” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

“I think there should be a fair representation of all of us – not just like, not just filling quotas – to show people that we care about this race or that culture. I think that the locals should be represented as well. I think there is at least resentment from the local population” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

Perceived deficiencies in the portrayal of people from minority ethnic backgrounds

There were sensitivities among many participants from minority ethnic backgrounds about how they are portrayed. This affected not just how they related to people on TV (because that is not limited to ethnicity) but is also about how they feel they are perceived by wider society through their portrayal on television in the UK. It applies across all genres, from drama and entertainment to factual content, although the onus is stronger on genres where there is greater editorial control.

Traditional family values

Some more traditional and conservative participants wanted TV to uphold traditional family values and were disapproving of depictions of sexual orientation and sexuality — that clashed with their values, especially those based on religious beliefs (such as two men kissing and female presenters wearing tight fitting clothes on TV). TV is an important social activity that can unite through shared experience, but it can expose conflicting values.

“I can cope with it, the homosexuality side of it... What I disagree with... is [showing] the two men kissing... My mum lives with me and we will be sitting there and all of a sudden two blokes will go at it on the telly. Fine, let them represent homosexuality, not got an issue with that – but not to that extent” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“That’s why I stopped watching EastEnders because in that same scenario I felt as though it was unbalanced. I’d never experienced a straight couple making out on EastEnders, but then you had this issue with these two guys [Sayed/Christian storyline] were making out on TV. That’s what really threw me off” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“As we grew up we have been told to keep your head covered or keep your top part of your body covered. But nowadays you see all tight-fitting dresses and things like that and it is quite embarrassing – the more Westerner. We are not saying don’t dress Western but be more modest” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

Disrespect

Some Black African men reported feeling uncomfortable with the perceived humiliation of minority ethnic celebrity guests on comedy shows.

“On Celebrity Juice [ITV2], they always get the Black one [guest] to put a sausage between legs [and pass it to someone else]. I saw Tinchy Stryder do it and he looked uncomfortable. They know their mum wouldn’t want them to be doing it. That’s just not how you’re brought up” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Portrayal of religion

Many Muslim participants voiced unhappiness about the portrayal of Muslims on TV – that they tended to be misunderstood, disrespected and even demonised, and that their religion obscured other aspects of their identity.

“They’re probably scared of Muslims [in the UK] because the way they’re portrayed – literally [just] the bad stuff” (male 18-34 South Asian Glasgow)

They claimed that Muslim characters tended to be portrayed in extremes – a figure of fun or a figure in turmoil. They wanted more normalised Muslim character portrayal on TV. *Citizen Khan* (BBC One) was given as an example, although it polarised opinions. While many Muslim participants claimed that the programme pandered to out-dated stereotypes, others praised its humour and up-to-date reflection of an Asian family.

“I think the issue with dramas and soaps is they always have a character and okay, let’s give this character a major flaw so he’s a Muslim but he’s also a wife beater or he’s a raging alcoholic or he’s a homosexual which as a Muslim, people would see that as a bad thing. So, it’s like let’s just give him a major flaw” (male 18-34 South Asian Glasgow)

“It [Citizen Khan] is disrespectful towards Muslims. He has this prayer mat and he’s going around and round shouting all the time. And then he has got a daughter dressed as... but she is texting, and she goes out at night. Muslims don’t do that. It gives a wrong picture of Muslims” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

“I think he [Citizen Khan] wants to break these barriers down and say look we [Muslims] are people as well, we can enjoy life. He has got one of the daughters who wants to play one thing at home and one thing outside, just to normalise them actually” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

“He’s the dad [in Citizen Khan], he’s just off his rockers, trying to control his family and make them live, make them not look like outsiders in society, he’s trying to keep them in line and I feel like that’s what a lot of our parents always tried to do” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

There were also some complaints among some Christian participants about the lack of representation and portrayal of religion from their ethnic perspective.

Conflation of religion and ethnicity

Alongside sensitivities around Muslim portrayal there were some concerns about a lack of differentiation of religion and ethnicity, particularly among many non-Muslim South Asians. Some of the Hindu and Sikh men were vexed about the catch-all phrase to describe all Asian communities in connection with negative news stories and this infected their attitudes towards all instances of portrayal.

“They say the abusers [in the Rotherham sex abuse case reported on TV] were Asian, but Asia is a big place. The perpetrators were Pakistani Muslims, so they should say that!” (male 55+ South Asian Hindu/Sikh Leicester)

Negative stereotypes

Many participants complained about portrayal that perpetuated outdated stereotypes, which can be detrimental both to self-identity and to how minority ethnic people are perceived by wider society. Many Black African and Black African Caribbean participants were critical of portrayal falling into distinct negative types: the drug-dealing criminal; dysfunctional families with absent fathers and struggling single mums; and the joker masking shortcomings. South Asian stereotypes that caused dismay included: the hackneyed corner shop and taxi driver; the hapless figure of fun; and one-dimensional Muslim characters. All generally despaired of portrayal of low achievement and lack of success – many participants wanted to see more examples of success stories across the board, in dramas, documentaries, quizzes and panel shows. The criticism was particularly strong about instances in dramas considered sensationalist and extreme.

“They always show white women as successful and rich. They have never shown any Black women as playing strong and successful characters. They are always shown as midwives or admins” (female 18-34 Black African London)

“It’s always the same. If you’ve got a shop, it’s an Asian shopkeeper. If you’ve got a taxi, it’s an Indian. Always the same bullshit stereotypes that are in every single TV show. It’s very rare that you get a break away from that stereotype” (male 18-34 South Asian Glasgow)

*“I live in St Paul’s. Like, it was crazy seeing the area that you walk about in but the way that they had painted it [in *Drugsland*, BBC Three] and like the angles that they filmed it from, it was just like the place is a war zone. I walked down it today... I’ve never known it to be ‘Crack Alley’” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)*

“The other day I watched this documentary where they were saying how there was violence, how there were gangs, young Black women as well as young Black men and the way they were delivering it, it was so negative. And it was just a minority of these people, but they made it look as though it was across the board” (female 55+ Black African Caribbean Nottingham)

Nevertheless, some participants were less inclined to complain about shows on Netflix focusing, for example, on a Black man as a drug dealer because they felt there is a wide range of portrayal of Black men on Netflix.

Constraints of political correctness

Some men of all ages in all the minority ethnic groups felt TV sometimes reflects an “us versus them” dynamic between minorities. They wanted to be seen in a positive light, but felt TV currently tends to prioritise LGBT people at the expense of minority ethnic groups due to political correctness.

“It’s cooler to be gay than Black” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Some older South Asian men asserted that, due to political correctness, comedy has become more restricted than it was in the past due to the fear of offending the audience, which is sometimes to the detriment of the entertainment.

“Yeah, it is more of a censorship. In the olden days Love Thy Neighbour was very offensive, you had a Black neighbour and a white neighbour and the guy, the white guy, used to be really offensive. Nowadays you are not allowed” (male 55+ South Asian Hindu/Sikh Leicester)

Furthermore, some men were particularly concerned that this perceived trend of political correctness constrained how they could express themselves and threatened to undermine their masculinity – that it was no longer possible for “men to be men”.

Uncomfortable truths

Positive portrayal is important to challenging bigotry and redressing societal inequalities, yet there was a tension evident between building self-esteem and reflecting uncomfortable truths. Many minority ethnic participants agreed portrayal should not gloss over difficult issues within a community – when uncomfortable truths are depicted, participants wanted it to be done carefully, in a way that feels authentic. This was considered an important responsibility for the BBC, particularly among some Black groups where marginalisation was keenly felt.

“So, they [lead characters in Bulletproof, Sky] are cops, they’re doing something positive, they’re not drug sellers, they’re not running around shooting people. None of that. And Ashley Waters has a Black wife and children, and he looks after them, he hasn’t run off” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Some participants suggested authenticity would be enhanced by including minority ethnic people off-screen – involved in the production as well as on-screen – by having content made “by us and for us”. Permission would then be more available to explore difficult topics, and the results would probably carry greater nuance and a better chance of feeling authentic.

Positive examples of representation and authentic portrayal

Despite these issues with perceived poor portrayal, there were also examples where more balanced, nuanced, rich, multi-dimensional and authentic portrayal was achieved.;

Participants noted this sense of authenticity could be achieved in two ways. Firstly, through depth of characterisation – for example, where a father is battling against his demons and striving to be a better person, revealing flaws and contradictions. Secondly, through the frequency of shows, because greater quantity means there is potential for greater variety of portrayal on the theme – for example, gang-leader protagonist in *Top Boy* (Channel 4) compared with the drug dealer in *Power* (Netflix).

“There was a programme called Top Boy (Channel 4, Netflix)... It was just reality basically about drugs, about people getting knifed. People stealing people’s girlfriends, blah, blah, blah... It was just negative, but it was entertaining. I don’t have a problem with seeing a Black guy dealing drugs, so long as that is not all that is being shown” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Across the research with people from minority ethnic backgrounds several themes around authentic portrayal emerged.

Male archetypes

Strong, charismatic male characters who might be flawed or rebellious but have redeeming qualities. This appealed particularly to some Black African and Black African Caribbean men in the context of a tough upbringing and needing to be streetwise to survive. Examples included: Tommy in *Peaky Blinders* (BBC Two); James "Ghost" St. Patrick in *Power* (Netflix); Earnest 'Earn' Marks in *Atlanta* (FOX, BBC Two); Jefferson Pierce in *Black Lightning* (Netflix); Captain Raymond Hope in *Brooklyn 99* (Netflix).

“His [Earnest 'Earn' Marks, Atlanta] character is flawed, quite dramatically. He does things wrong and he knows he’s doing them wrong. But it’s the way that he deals with the situation that’s interesting to watch” (male 35-54 Black African London)

“The character [Jefferson Pierce in Black Lightning] is a positive guy. You know his wife has left him, but he’s brought up his two daughters. And he kind of gets back with his wife while sort of helping to clean up crime secretly while at the same time he’s the principal of a school” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

Female archetypes

Maternal, caring and strong female characters, which appealed particularly to some of the female participants. Examples included: Latrice Butler in *Seven Seconds* (Netflix); Zoya Farooqui in *Qubool Hai* (Zee TV).

Respectability

This was particularly important to South Asian participants, especially those who were older and more traditional, and those who were concerned to have clean-cut, inoffensive content for family viewing.

“They have to look presentable – casual, no tie. He [Bradley Walsh] will wear suits sometimes, sometimes he’ll come in jacket and trousers, shirt wide open, you know, he’s relaxed in the way that he’s presenting the show” (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

Familiar scenarios

It was not just the rounded characters that participants mentioned but also the recognisable situations that made for effective portrayal, from the insidious racism depicted in *Black-ish* (E4/Netflix) to the “everyday madness” that resonated for many Black African and Black African Caribbean men in the portrayal of the *The Cleavelands* (Fox UK), which epitomised their experience of the Black family – strong personalities, unpredictability, loving arguments, and dominant parental figures.

“Even when he [the protagonist in Black-ish, E4/Netflix] goes to work – he’s actually quite high up – but even his boss still don’t respect him that much. And that’s how it would be in the real world. I’ve been in that situation where no matter how much your knowledge exceeds theirs [white people], they will always let you remember, you’re the Black guy” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Maintaining a strong connection to cultural roots

Participants tended to be attracted to people on TV who are successful, openly acknowledge their roots and come across as being genuine and approachable. Examples of influential people on TV that have started off with modest means include: Ian Wright in *Match of the Day* (BBC One), Reggie Yates in *The Insider: Reggie Yates* (BBC Three), Nadiya, a winner of *The Great British Bake Off* (BBC One), and Doreen Lawrence in *Stephen: The Murder That Changed a Nation* (BBC One). Others mentioned with admiration included Viola Davis (actor/producer), Krishnan Guru-Murthy (presenter), Kim Kardashian (reality TV personality and socialite) and Priyanka Chopra (actor who has achieved success in Hollywood), all of whom participants felt have broken through barriers. The admiration extended to all kinds of people, regardless of ethnicity, and included fictional characters.

“She [Elizabeth McCord in Madam Secretary] is just like this woman that finds a balance, if you know what I mean. So, if they need her to go to Egypt, she speaks Arabic, she speaks French, she’s just this woman that does it all” (female 18-34 Black African London)

“He [Man Like Mobeen, BBC Three] is exactly the character that we want. He was in the middle, you could see he was going about his daily life as a normal Muslim person rather than being really religious or being the complete opposite spectrum, being gay or something” (male 18-34 South Asian Glasgow)

“Fresh Prince of Bel-Air, we had a dad who looked after his family and lived in a beautiful house and was rich and was a judge. How many Black judges do you know? He sends all his children to private school, they were all from a well-to-do family, but he was positive, there was discipline, there wasn’t any kind of negativity” (male 35-54 Black African London)

Desmonds (Channel 4) was cited as a ground-breaking sitcom for featuring an all-Black cast, with authentic character portrayal of a “typical” Black family staged in a London barber shop. Similarly, *The Kumars at No. 42* (BBC) was considered a ground-breaking show that played with Asian stereotypes and was created by Asian scriptwriters.

“I think when it’s a cast of all Black or mostly Black and then it’s the stereotypes are being pushed, we interpret it as we’re taking our own stereotypes and twisting them to make them good for ourselves” (female 18-34 Black African London)

“It was crazy to see that that is how Caribbean people not only lived, but they were successful. I mean Desmond had his own shop” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

“Even on his talk show [The Kumars at No. 42], his talk show was done well when he had like his family on it and it was like his mum, his gran, his dad but they were stereotyped characters and he was just himself” (female 35-54 South Asian Glasgow)

Stephen: The Murder That Changed a Nation (BBC One) was considered to be a measured programme with cultural value, providing Black audiences with connection to their cultural roots, as well as providing an insight for wider audiences – playing well to both the ‘mirror’ and the ‘window’ roles.

“As a black mum of two boys, I could relate to it [Stephen: The Murder That Changed a Nation] because you know the struggles that they’ve had. So yeah, that was quite eye-opening and quite emotional actually. And the fight for this woman and how strong she was as a black woman and a mother fighting for her child to get justice” (female 55+ Nottingham)

Audience assessment of the BBC’s delivery of representation and portrayal

While improvements would be welcome – and most participants agreed the BBC should strive to do better – there are ways for audiences to access content with more authentic representation and portrayal from other sources, such as SVOD services, US shows and specialist ethnic providers. Black African and Black African Caribbean participants cited Netflix, Amazon, BET, TBN, and Nigerian TV; and South Asian participants referred to Punjabi Bhangra channels, B4U and Islamic Channels. These sources provide better cultural connection through portrayal that is richer and more authentic.

“American TV is a lot better in that respect because if you compare British and American TV there is a lot more variety and so you get all kinds [of portrayal] and so you don’t tend to complain so much” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

"It [BET] is a channel for Black people with programmes made by Black people. They tailor it to Black people. You get to watch Black families" (female 18-34 Black African London)

"Whenever I have got time I just watch mix and match, so some Asian and some English" (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

"I would rather they don't show Asians or our culture at all rather than showing a stereotypical and out of date character. I won't miss it if they don't show it because I watch Asian TV. But if BBC show it they should get it right" (female 35-54 South Asian Glasgow)

Some older men felt uncomfortable about changing trends in portrayal, perceiving that LGBT portrayal was improving more than the portrayal of other minorities. They had also noticed more attention being paid to the representation and portrayal of women.

"I think the BBC is in a strange position at the moment because their main focus at the moment is equality for women. So, what you see now is women... everywhere" (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

The BBC was described as losing some relevance with increasing competitive choice, but there were still high expectations of the BBC to raise awareness of diversity issues, encourage social acceptance and challenge negative stereotypes.

Generally, South Asian participants believed representation of ethnic minorities has improved, but Black participants felt more effort was needed. Most, regardless of ethnic background, agreed that portrayal needs improvement.

"[The BBC is] getting there slowly. I don't think they are there, but they are trying to change their ways in bringing the different communities into programmes, whether it be a documentary or whether it be a soap. So I think they are trying to get the balance right" (male 55+ South Asian Leicester)

Perceptions of BBC Three were more positive in relation to representation and portrayal. BBC Three was viewed as more inclusive and diverse, modern and edgy in its approach and its shift to online-only was regretted by those participants who were familiar with BBC Three and who interpreted this move as a sign of little real commitment to diversity.

"Well I think the BBC for me needs to be bolder and not be so safe in their programmes. Yeah it is like going back to Doctor Who as an example; let's have a Black Doctor!" (male 35-54 Black African London)

"I think BBC One does play a narrative. They have their own form of agenda. Whereas Channel 4 more kind of gives the view on both hands" (female 55+ Black African Caribbean Nottingham)

"That [BBC Three] used to be OUR channel!" (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

“I think Channel 4 started up as an independent station, so they had no constraints they could push the boundaries. A little bit more controversial” (male 18-34 Black African Caribbean Bristol)

It was suggested that the BBC could learn from US content and programmes on ethnic TV channels which were perceived to provide multi-dimensional characters and avoid any sense of tokenism. More emphasis was wanted on positive portrayal of success, as well as on having incidental portrayal in place of sensationalised caricatures across genres.

“Our children are doing very well nowadays. They are in a high level and they have got a good job but they don’t show all of these. They show something on the television and everything is negative” (female 55+ South Asian Birmingham)

There was also a call for the BBC to produce more programmes that focus on issues that interest minority ethnic audiences, such as social history, religion, culture, cuisine and well-considered documentaries in the mould of *Stephen: The Murder That Changed a Nation* (BBC One).

Section 3: LGBT people

Summary

The representation and portrayal of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people on television in the UK was considered important to many LGBT people across the research and most felt there had been much improvement in recent years, particularly in terms of representation.

However, participants frequently expressed the feeling that more could be done and that currently the representation of lesbian, gay and bisexual (LGB) people can feel tokenistic and uneven, in favour of men over women.

There were also concerns relating to portrayal; that television still relies upon outdated stereotypes and narrow portrayal focusing on sexuality and sexual orientation over other characteristics, particularly with younger female characters. Soaps were said to perform well at representation, but in terms of portrayal sometimes to be either disappointingly implausible or reliant on clichéd stereotypes. Furthermore, LGB characters were perceived as being marginalised into supportive rather than long-term lead roles.

There was a call for more multi-layered, incidental and focused portrayal of LGBT people, with strong characterisation that is not simply about sexual orientation, and a diverse cast of age, gender and ethnicity.

Currently content perceived to perform better in terms of representation and portrayal can be found on Netflix, Sky and Channel 4. BBC Three was said to perform better than other BBC channels. However, more could be done by the BBC, particularly in providing programmes specifically for LGBT people – otherwise the BBC risks losing these audiences.

Introduction

This module of the research included people of different ages, people from minority ethnic backgrounds, and people at different stages of their 'coming out journey'. It spanned a range of attitudes, from those who wear their sexual identity as a badge of honour through to others who feel more ambivalent or private about it.

"For me it's like, I'm gay but it's not a defining factor of who I am. It's not something that I have to say" (male 18-34 gay Liverpool)

The trans people in this research identified as heterosexual and felt they held a different place in society, not yet sharing the wider understanding and acceptance of lesbians, gay men and bisexual people (LGB). They wanted to be perceived as being 'normal' and felt extremely sensitive to being presented as a prurient spectacle.

"I'd like people to look at me and not objectify me for being trans" (male 18-34 trans London)

The powerful role of representation & portrayal on television

The research found that the representation and portrayal on TV of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) people is considered important on several levels, covering both TV's role as a mirror (to see LGBT people on screen) and in its role as a window (so that wider society sees LGBT people on TV).

Inclusion

LGBT people felt strongly that their lives should be reflected on TV, alongside everyone else's. They wanted a sense of validation through rich and sympathetic portrayal.

"I feel like it's more important for me... Most people turn on the TV and they see themselves anyway. When you turn on the TV and... when you do see yourself it feels nice, you feel like you relate, you are just a lot more emotionally invested and then it means a lot more" (male 18-34 gay London)

"[It's] therapeutic in a way – like if you're going through something and somebody on TV is going through like a similar situation" (female 18-34 lesbian London)

Visibility

Showing LGBT people to the wider world can promote acceptance. Trans people, in particular, wanted greater understanding and acceptance.

"If you see it on the telly it won't be such a shock when you see it next door" (male 18-34 gay Liverpool)

"Transgender people exist... They're trying to get the word out there" (male 18-34 trans London)

"[Soaps] are good at getting the message out to people... Lots of underlying issues people can talk about" (male 18-34 trans London)

*"Reality TV is a bit f***ed up because basically they tried and tested mould... is to get the most extreme people you can and put them together. They apply that same model to homosexuality. And the reason it doesn't work is because there is no positive representation in the first place"* (female 18-34 bisexual London)

Celebration

The research found that the significance of validation and reassurance was more acute for trans people, who can feel more marginalised. More frequent representation, and authentic portrayal, could reduce their sense of isolation. They wanted their lives to be celebrated, with a focus on the positive outcome of their transition, to offset the trauma of the journey.

"We want something for us to watch... some positivity... Why does it have to be so gloomy?... We're the same as everyone else – show the afterlife, not the hospital... I'm going through that myself – I need to see something positive" (male 18-34 trans London)

*“The balance is hard to find... [trans] is always paraded like a wildlife documentary”
(male 18-34 trans London)*

Education and role models

TV’s ability to educate was considered particularly important by trans people, to help those growing up identifying as trans, as well as for wider society. Bisexual people also felt positive portrayal could help address negative perceptions of bisexuality.

“It’s about opening doors, raising awareness... There are people who want to come out and they’re scared... It’s good to have role models on TV” (female 18-34 trans London)

“We have positive representation of heterosexuality every day... When you are putting a trans person into a Big Brother house, for some people that is going to be the first time they come into contact with a transgender person. So if that person is negative, or has a negative outlook, that is actually harming how people view that community” (female 18-34 bisexual London)

*“It’s more important for people younger than us... You [still] don’t see that end point... someone living a nice life... You get so much depression... Say I’m 11 years old again, I’m researching this stuff and see five years of surgery... I’ll think I don’t want that life”
(male 18-34 trans London)*

“Growing up as a transgender I had to research everything myself... Seeing people on TV go through surgery is nice to see... [it shows] there’s a future” (male 18-34 trans London)

Generally, television’s portrayal of LGBT people was considered to have improved over the past decade, in line with an improving status in society. TV was perceived to show more varied characters and nuanced stories, with less reliance on stereotype and cliché. Representation and portrayal of gay men in particular was discussed as having moved on from its focus in the past on camp figures, such as Mr Humphries in *Are You Being Served*, and comedian/presenter Larry Grayson, although these figures remain resonant for an older generation for older gay men.

Perceived deficiencies in the representation of LGBT people

The research found that LGBT people felt their appearance on TV can sometimes feel tokenistic, as if done to meet a quota.

“It is a good thing [to have LGBT themes] but it’s because obviously they’re doing it for themselves. They’re doing it so that they look progressive... but I think they’re not doing it because they want to do it” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

“I think they should write a character to cover something a bit more diverse... Token characters [are included] just for dramatising it, like [for] entertainment, which isn’t very positive in my eyes” (female 18-34 bisexual London)

Representation of LGB people was considered uneven, favouring men over women, while the representation of older LGB people, LGB parents/families, and trans people was considered limited.

“For me personally, yes, I would like to see more things with more, older gay females in it. You know, I don’t mean to represent my lifestyle – I don’t need anyone to do that – but it would be of interest to me and it would allow people to maybe have a wee bit better understanding I think of what is a gay” (female 55+ lesbian Glasgow)

Although there was a recognition that they are beginning to be seen on TV, the representation of trans people was felt to be limited. The trans participants were particularly keen for more representation.

Perceived deficiencies in the portrayal of LGBT people

There is a portrayal paradox for LGB people – which is particularly pronounced for trans people – in seeking the balance between visibility and avoiding the spotlight. We found that visibility was considered important in claiming a stake in society, but incessant attention on sexuality was not wanted. Moreover, poor portrayal was especially noticeable, with those who feel most marginalised being the most sensitive.

The portrayal of LGBT people can perpetuate stereotypes in several ways:

Exaggeration

Exaggerating the traits of sexual identity can perpetuate stereotyped perceptions: men who are camp and effeminate or promiscuous sexual predators; women who are butch and asexual or extremely femininely sexualised.

“A lot of the time they like to portray lesbians as quite masculine. It’s either one extreme or the other... You don’t get the middle of the road, just your regular people” (female 18-34 lesbian London)

“People more look at gay men as like disgusting people, whereas men look at lesbians as ‘wow they’re sexy’. Like, we’re more sexualised” (female 18-34 lesbian London)

Reductive focus

Reductively focusing on sexuality and sexual difference, at the expense of other characteristics, was felt to be disliked. Some felt soaps were particularly vulnerable to this portrayal trap.

“I want to live my life as a normal everyday man, not a transgender man... They’re trying to spotlight it and making me feel different... I don’t want to be different... It’s impossible to be accepted if we’re always going to be ‘the transgender’” (male 18-34 trans London)

“I think it was just more, it was categorising, it was putting people into categories and I hate that... If you have short hair, then you’re going to be the butch one... If you have

tattoos, then you're going to be in this bracket... It's quite stereotypical" (female 18-34 lesbian London)

Limited portrayal

There was a perception that in portraying LGB characters TV defaults to portrayal of 'coming out' narratives that involve trauma and rejection.

"Someone who is just living their life and happens to be gay. And there's no family that has kicked them out or there's no struggle with like trying to find out who they are. There is no, like, just gay" (male 18-34 gay London)

"To ignore [the gay struggle] would probably be inaccurate but... it's always a bit too prominent in the storyline... it just creates a stereotype" (male 18-34 gay London)

Similarly, trans portrayal was considered to focus on surgery, depression and struggles, thus ensnaring trans people as objects of sensation.

"You're going to think I'm always depressed, that's how it's always portrayed. It's never really anything positive" (male 18-34 trans London)

"They only ever show them [trans people] going through it... You never see the end result – someone happy... it's always depressing" (male 18-34 trans London)

Marginalisation

LGBT participants felt that LGBT characters can often be marginalised – occupying support roles but never the lead, and with those roles tending to be the nasty character, comical, or in some other way exceptional.

"They never really have much depth. It's always just the sidekick, the backup" (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

"Where I see the majority of gay men is in a comedy like Will & Grace, Modern Family and stuff like that. It's not really a serious scenario" (female 18-34 lesbian London)

The main soap operas, across all public service broadcasters, were thought to represent LGBT characters, but portrayal can sometimes be disappointingly implausible. For example, audiences talked about Sonia, an established character in BBC's *EastEnders*, whom they felt had unrealistically "turned gay" to serve a plotline. What some people applaud as tackling diverse issues is to others evidence of misunderstanding and trivialising sexual orientation.

"It would be nice to see a character that is consistent with their sexuality, as people are in real life" (female 18-34 bisexual London)

"Representation is key and it's important... but at times it feels a bit token... It can feel like they are including them to say they are diverse... With EastEnders they had a trans guy once but he seemed very stereotypical" (male 18-34 trans London)

Positive examples relating to the authentic portrayal of LGBT people

The research found that LGBT people want more authentic portrayal that moves away from narrow clichés towards rounded characterisation. They do not want to refute some of the stereotypes, but they want to diversify from the extremes.

“A lot of gay characters are like in both ends of the spectrum. So you have the really really really really macho gay guy, or you have the really flamboyant gay guy. There’s nothing wrong with either of them because they are both accurate depictions, but you very rarely just have like someone who – there is a storyline about them and they happen to be gay as well – but it is usually focused on the fact they are gay and like the struggle around that or whatever” (male 18-34 gay London)

Incidental and focused portrayal

LGBT people want both incidental and focused portrayal. In general programming, across genres, incidental portrayal should authentically portray LGBT people without making a big deal of it. An example of incidental portrayal was in a passing reference in an episode of *Dr Who* (BBC) to a lesbian relationship. That the comment was casual positioned the relationship as unremarkable, making it feel normal.

“In Doctor Who, the most recent assistant was a young Black lesbian. And from day one you knew she was a lesbian and she went on a couple of dates and that’s all you ever heard about it” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

“I’d like to see someone just be cool about their sexuality and like them to be a normal character” (female 18-34 bisexual London)

However, at the same time, LGBT people wanted rich and multi-layered portrayal in LGBT focused shows. *Cucumber Banana Tofu* (Channel 4, E4 and All4) was cited as a good example because it contained many LGBT characters, with interesting plotlines, strong characterisation that was not simply about sexual orientation, and a diverse cast of age, gender and ethnicity, revolving around predominantly gay characters. Programmes that are well written and produced can be powerfully resonant, although the relevance of each show can vary across the LGBT community.

“I happen to have a lesbian friend whose favourite TV show ever is The L Word. I could not give two shiny shins about that programme. It doesn’t do anything for me, but for her it’s very important that she could see someone that she could imagine [being] her wife and whatever” (male 18-34 gay Liverpool)

Other positive examples of programmes cited included *The L Word* (Sky Living) – an example of a programme that revolves around female characters – *London Spy* (BBC Two) and *Happy Endings* (E4).

“The only thing I can relate to is the L Word. That was absolutely fantastic... That is exactly the life I had” (female 55+ lesbian Glasgow)

“They were portraying their jobs [in the L Word] and what they did if they had arguments with people. There’s nothing in it to say right, you I’m a lesbian and I’m a doctor, right. But it was just you got on with whatever job you were in” (female 55+ lesbian Glasgow)

“BBC did one called London Spy, did you watch that? That was incredible. It was really good. And that was the first time I thought oh aye this is, but yet it was still sort of – he was bisexual and then he met this guy and then they were a gay couple... It was the first time I thought oh they’re really actually giving it a bit of a go” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

“Happy Endings was a really good comedy and they had that character called Max... he was just a gay character. They had the little boyfriend storyline but yes that was [it]. I remember that being really good” (male 18-34 gay London)

Further examples of good portrayal cited in our research, whether incidental or focused, were notably dominated by Netflix. Some were broadcast a long time ago and this reinforces the need for authentic portrayal of LGBT people because it can have a long-lasting impact.

- Examples cited by women: *Girls* (Sky); *L Word* (Sky Living); *Master of None* (Netflix); *Dear White People* (Netflix); *Queer Eye* (Netflix); *Unbreakable Kimmy Schmidt* (Netflix); *Modern Family* (Sky); *Sugar Rush* (C4); *Glee* (E4/Channel 4, Sky); *Gogglebox* (Channel 4); *Graham Norton* (BBC One); *EastEnders* (BBC One); *Coronation Street* (ITV); *Emmerdale* (ITV); *River City* (BBC One); lesbians *Rose and Rosie* (YouTube).
- Examples cited by men: *RuPaul’s Drag Race* (Netflix); *Genderquake* (Channel 4); *Will & Grace* (Channel 5); *London Spy* (BBC Two); *Glee* (E4/Channel 4, Sky); *Downton Abbey* (ITV); *Pose* (FX); *Happy Endings* (E4); *Queer as Folk* (Channel 4); *Gimme Gimme Gimme* (BBC Two).
- Trans people claimed to gravitate towards all trans people and characters on TV. Examples given were: Riley Carter played Kyle Slater in *EastEnders* (BBC One); Annie Wallace played head teacher Mrs St. Clair in *Hollyoaks* (Channel 4); news presenter India Willoughby (Channel 5); *Genderquake* (Channel 4); *Orange is the New Black* (Netflix); *Star* (US show with trans character).

There were familiar themes across these examples – identity struggle, coming out, and feeling a misfit – as well as other narratives, some of which were more relevant and interesting. We found that coming out, for example, seemed to be less relevant to older and established LGB people.

LGBT people relate to a wide variety of people and characters on TV, depending on their interests, but we found that certain types of portrayal were particularly resonant.

The outsider figure – private, cautious, stoical, vulnerable, nerdy. Examples included: Robyn from *Casualty* (BBC One) keeps her feelings inside; Stephen Mangan interviewed on *Graham Norton* (BBC One); Mark Corrigan, *Peep Show* (Channel 4); Lito, *Sense8* (Netflix).

“I’m not used to seeing people like me represented on TV. So I usually relate to the weird people on the show” (female 18-34 bisexual London)

Social interaction and family dynamics, where relatable human qualities shine through. Examples: Peter Kay in *Car Share* (BBC); *Friday Night Dinner* (Channel 4).

Strong, resilient characters who have hidden depths, including empowered females within patriarchy. Examples given included: Stacey Dooley (BBC Three); Catherine Cawood, *Happy Valley* (BBC One); Doreen Lawrence in the news and the documentary *Stephen: The Murder That Changed a Nation* (BBC One); Paul Hollywood in *The Great British Bake Off* (BBC, Channel 4); Ellen DeGeneres, *The Ellen DeGeneres Show* (ITV2); Callie Torres in *Grey’s Anatomy* (Sky Living, Channel 5); Gemma Collins, *TOWIE* (ITV Be); the lead character in *The Mindy Project* (E4); Jax Teller, *Sons of Anarchy* (Netflix).

“I’ve never seen a character on TV that I could relate to more than Mindy, not only aesthetically but also by character. I think this show was amazing and ground breaking: watching a woman of colour going through the trials and tribulations of any normal rom com that’s usually played by a white female, showcasing that we are all the same no matter what, was empowering. She is strong willed and hilarious... I found watching her every week to be very comforting and significant. She was not the same size zero that we see, which I am neither, but she was a southern Asian character that wasn’t racially stereotyped... Just a character that we could all fall in love with because of her, and not because of her size and ethnicity” (male 18-34 gay South Asian London)

The importance of representation and portrayal of LGBT people across genres

The research found that most television genres have an important role in providing both incidental and focused portrayal. For instance, we found that documentaries, current affairs and news, and drama and soaps, can help to inform and educate society about LGBT people. Soaps, dramas, reality and lifestyle genres also have the potential to include LGBT people through incidental portrayal. Sport was the one genre where portrayal was not considered an issue, although sport was considered to be lacking in LGBT representation, and it was noted that this deficiency extends beyond the screen to sportspeople as well.

*“I think it’s really important to have some people like that, like having gays and stuff. It just helps normalise it. Like in *Hollyoaks* there is a woman that is a man who is the headmistress or something. She’s gone through the trans stuff. There is so much of that around now. It just raises awareness of things. It sounds really silly and poncey, but it makes society better and more accepting” (male 18-34 gay Liverpool)*

Attitudes towards casting LGBT people for LGBT roles

LGBT people said that they have some interest in the status of actors and presenters. They felt that knowing there are LGBT people on TV, who are accepted for who they are and have successful careers, gives them a confidence boost. Examples cited included Graham Norton, Sandy Toksvig, Stephen Fry, John Barrowman and India Willoughby.

Related to this, there were mixed views about whether LGBT characters on television should be played by LGBT actors (matched casting). Some argued that sexual identity should not be a factor in casting roles. Thus, the gay lead in *Will & Grace* is played by the straight actor Eric McCormack, while Wentworth Miller played the straight lead in *Prison Break*. Some also cited possible career risks for LGBT actors coming out. Most felt that experience and qualification should outweigh identity in factual programmes such as news and sports.

“I wouldn’t say oh I’m outraged that Will is played by a heterosexual male and should be swapped over to someone who is gay because like there would be no way that you could run the world that way with regards to TV shows. There would be a serious lack. You’d get the same people cast constantly. It would just be ridiculous” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

“[The BBC should] choose people who are better equipped for the job and, like, don’t be ticking boxes. If somebody is more knowledgeable in that sport, for example, than that [other] person [choose the one suited to the job]” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

However, others believed in matched casting in order to promote the status of LGBT people, as well as the hope of better portrayal that is more realistic, recognisable and authentic. Trans people were particularly sensitive to the portrayal of trans people and wanted more to be done to increase the number of trans characters on TV and to nurture trans actors for those roles.

“There used to be a character called Hayley playing a trans woman but she was born a biological woman so I couldn’t relate to it... It encourages people to come out knowing they are trans... It’s important for people to play themselves... If they want a transgender character, hire a transgender person... [If it’s] more real you can relate to it” (male 18-34 trans London)

“[Orange Is The New Black features a trans person.] It was normalised – they don’t make a song and dance about it... When [it isn’t normalised] it doesn’t sit right with me... You can tell from the jargon they use whether they are really transgender or not [in real life]” (male 18-34 trans London)

Audience assessment of the BBC’s delivery of representation and portrayal

Generally, participants felt the BBC should be bolder in its representation and portrayal of LGBT people or risk losing these audiences to other channels, such as Netflix, Channel 4 and Sky, which they perceived as doing well at diverse inclusion. Participants said the BBC delivers well in places – for example, in LGBT inclusion in soaps and in diverse short programmes on BBC Three – but that it could be doing more.

“BBC Three – definitely more progressive and more forward thinking than the rest of the BBC shows – definitely” (male 18-34 bisexual Glasgow)

“I think they [the BBC] need to be the trailblazers, because they’ve got the luxury of not having shareholders to not make them do really populist things all the time. So they need

to be setting the standard for other people to follow – basically to make sure people aren't demonized or whatever” (male 18-34 gay Liverpool)

Netflix and Sky were considered to be doing better with drama and comedy, particularly high-quality LGBT focused content from the US, while Channel 4 was considered braver and more successful in providing authentic LGBT portrayal with rich narratives.

LGBT people wanted the BBC to continue driving for diversity across its output. They wanted it to be reflective of the diversity of real life – including older LGBT people, long established relationships, LGBT parents and family units, and having interlocking characteristics that embrace ethnic diversity and disability – in order to include those they considered to be under-represented.

“They don't have really anything for older lesbians and gay [on TV]. It's all orientated round the younger generation” (female 55+ lesbian Glasgow)

“I think the shows could be more diverse. They seem to take a stereotype and talk about that in one show, and then talk about another stereotype in another show, but that's not real life. I think at the moment we're really lucky to live in a very diverse society. And that's our normality” (female 18-34 lesbian London)

They wanted the portrayal of sexuality to be toned down and tempered with other aspects of life. They wanted clichéd stereotypes to be replaced by rounded people and situations, avoiding extreme portrayal that objectifies, sensationalises and treats groups as different. They wanted more incidental LGBT portrayal across genres. They also pointed to the need for long-running dramas to maintain character credibility: changing a character's sexuality to serve a dramatic storyline, as participants pointed out had happened in *EastEnders*, can feel insulting.

“You get like the loud sassy friend, or like the macho gay Black who is like hiding his sexuality and like battling... You get nothing in the middle, nothing in between” (male 18-34 gay London)

In addition to the normalising effect of incidental portrayal, LGBT participants wanted the BBC to provide programmes specifically for each part of the diverse LGBT community.

Participants felt that nuanced, compelling portrayal would be more likely if there were more LGBT scriptwriters and actors creating the content and ensuring quality.

“Hire a diverse writing/production team, yes... Because I feel like when you bring in a wider representation into a production team you create... more relatable content, more better quality content, like funnier, because you are just getting a wider range of opinions” (male 18-34 gay London)

Section 4: Disabled people

Summary

Disability was not always a defining characteristic for participants, except among some of the most severely affected. As such, disabled people tended to focus on the representation and portrayal of others, such as minority ethnic groups and older women, before themselves.

Many across the research samples felt there was not enough representation of disabled people on television in the UK, particularly when they considered how many families in the UK must be affected by a disability or long-term health condition.

It was frequently argued that better representation and more authentic portrayal on television is needed for many reasons - including to raise awareness, support disabled audiences and their families by providing helplines at the end of programmes, and to promote inclusion.

Disabled participants were more sensitive to the inauthentic portrayal of people with disabilities and long-standing health conditions, and many voiced concerns about extreme and overly simplistic portrayal. There was a strong desire for more people with disabilities to be shown in incidental ways and not always to focus on the disability or health condition at the expense of other characteristics.

Soaps and dramas were praised for demonstrating better representation and portrayal than other genres. But there were many concerns expressed relating to tokenism across genres, including soaps, and the over-reliance on wheelchair users in these instances.

There was a sense that the BBC could do more to improve the representation and portrayal of disabled people, and Channel 4 was seen as performing slightly better than the BBC in this regard.

Introduction

Disabled participants were interviewed in their home. The wider research programme also included disabled people, and venues with disabled access were selected for this purpose.

We spoke to people with a range of disabilities including: sensory (hearing and visual), physical impairments (mobility, scoliosis ataxia, and stroke survivors with mobility issues); learning disabilities (neuro-diversity / cognitive, including autism and epilepsy); and long-standing illnesses (anxiety, depression, spinal conditions, cancer and idiopathic intracranial hypertension). The disabilities ranged from mild to moderate and severe⁵. Some had been affected since birth and others over time, and some had more than one disability.

As stated previously, identity is multi-dimensional, and disability was not always a defining characteristic for participants. Other characteristics, such as age, gender, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, where one was born, where one lived, socio-economic status, working

⁵ The research did not include participants with severe learning difficulties.

status, whether a parent or a lone parent and so on, could be just as important, if not more so.

Whether they identified as disabled tended to influence how strongly they felt about representation and portrayal in relation to disabilities, and was dependent upon a few key factors:

- The **severity and impact** of their disability on their day-to-day lives (constant versus occasional). Some with mild disabilities did not necessarily consider themselves to be disabled
- The **duration** of having the disability (from birth or childhood versus the last few years). Coming to terms with having a disability or long-standing illness in later life can be a significant life change and adapting can be a huge adjustment
- Their **level of acceptance** and whether they acknowledged their disability and were open to support and helping others with the same disability. Those with a moderate to severe disability since birth were more likely to have a higher level of acceptance, know others with the same disability and identify as disabled.

The powerful role of representation & authentic portrayal on television

It was a commonly held view across the research modules that there was a likelihood that at some point in their life anyone could be affected either directly or indirectly by a long-standing illness or a disability. It is therefore understandable that the representation and authentic portrayal of disabled people on TV would be important to many.

The research found that representation and portrayal in this context is considered important on several levels:

Countering myths and stigmas

Participants felt that TV if TV were able to dispel myths around disability, this would help to remove the ignorance and stigmas that can surround some conditions.

A young male participant, who has been unable to walk since childhood due to a rare disease, described the widespread ignorance about his disability, and the fact that people can often incorrectly assume that he also has a learning disability.

“Sometimes there is a misconception between a physical disability and a mental [learning] disability and at school people would ask me why I can talk fine... It’s good for both people who are disabled and for other people to try and see that we are normal people, just because they are disabled they can do the same job that other people can do” (male 18-34 physical impairment Swansea)

Encouraging empathy

Another role of TV for many disabled participants was to promote empathy and tolerance and to try to encourage connection and inclusion. A young male participant with Asperger syndrome explained that he would like TV to represent and accurately portray more disabled people with conditions such as autism and Asperger syndrome to help those with a condition

like this to be more open about their experience. More awareness also helps people in wider society to understand more about how to respond to people with these conditions.

“Some days I want to tell people because then they can understand why I’m socially awkward but other days I just want to be treated like I’m normal” (male 18-34 learning disability South England)

“It [TV] can easily influence your outlook and you don’t know how to act as a teenager and you need guidance and you see certain characters [on TV] and you think ‘Oh, this is how I should act’” (male 18-34 learning disability London)

Providing inspirational role models

Disabled participants also felt that TV should endeavour to inspire by promoting positive role models. Another young male participant with a physical impairment asserted that disabled characters on TV tend to be shown as downtrodden and unhappy with their lives. He expressed the need for more positive role models for him to relate to and to inspire disabled audiences.

“Everyone feels sorry for that [disabled] character... in drama shows with people with a disability, they are down and hate their life... most people with disabilities just get on with it and live their life just the best they can and so I’d like to see that” (male 18-34 physical impairment Swansea)

Reducing isolation

To reduce any sense of isolation and promote a feeling of being valued by society. Having actors and presenters openly discuss having a disability and how they have overcome challenges was appreciated. Robin Williams and Daryl Hannah were cited as being inspirational for openly discussing their experience of having Asperger syndrome and autism respectively. Eamon Holmes was also cited as a positive role model, after openly discussing wearing a hearing aid on *This Morning* (ITV) and Stephanie Beacham was celebrated after revealing that she had a hearing impairment on *Loose Women* (ITV).

“The one I relate to quite recently was a lady called Stephanie Beacham, the actress... She has the same hearing loss as I have, exactly. So, when she came on [Loose Women] I was so happy to see her... Normally the panel sit either side of the guest, the guest sits in the middle. This time she sat at the far end and I knew why. Then the host was saying I am sure people are wondering why Stephanie is here and this is the reason why. And they were going on to explain about her being deaf. And then Stephanie explained her story, and I just thought it was great. It made me so happy, it really did...I can relate to it, I am exactly the same as her” (female 18-34 hearing impairment Belfast)

Increasing visibility

Many across the research samples felt strongly that more could be done to increase the visibility of disabled people and to have open discussion about disabilities on TV, and that this was important to raise awareness and promote inclusion within society.

Providing incidental and focused portrayal

There was also a strong desire among disabled participants for both incidental and focused portrayal of disabilities on TV. Incidental portrayal should authentically portray disabled people without making the disability a key feature. On the other hand, when a disability or long-standing illness is the focus of a storyline, participants appreciate rich and multi-layered and well-researched portrayal.

Most across the research samples felt that documentaries, drama and soaps are in a good position to do more to inform and educate society about living with disabilities and long-term illnesses. These genres were said to have large audience reach and allow audiences to see the development of characters over time.

Perceptions relating to the representation of disabled people on television

The representation of disabled people on TV was perceived by many across the research samples to have improved over recent years. Across all genres, soaps (across all the main broadcasters) were thought to perform better at this.

In the past, it was felt that a disabled character, newsreader or presenter would have stood out as unusual or incongruous, but this is not necessarily the case now.

“Five, ten years ago they wouldn’t have talked as much about disability... In Coronation Street they have a girl who is in a wheelchair” (female 55+ hearing impairment Belfast)

“There is a guy on The One Show that is on channel one [BBC One] and they have an African Caribbean guy... and he does a lot of the interviews and stuff in a wheelchair ... but years ago it would be ‘I can’t believe that they would put someone in a wheelchair on TV’ type of thing” (female 35-54 long standing illness Belfast)

Despite these improvements, many across the research believed that the number of people with visible and less visible disabilities seen on TV still does not seem to reflect real life,

“One in four people have mental health problems and that is a lot of people. I think mental health is not covered enough” (female 35-54 long standing illness Swansea)

Furthermore, when a disabled person appears on TV, it could often feel tokenistic, as if done to meet a quota. Many disabled people argued that there can often seem to be just one actor with a disability, particularly in the main soaps, and this tends to be a wheelchair user. Inclusion of disabled people on TV can seem in vogue at specific times and then might dip, for instance when one soap features a specific disability or long-standing illness that has not been shown on TV before, all the other soaps seem quickly to follow suit.

“There was a programme where they had somebody in a wheelchair and it just wasn’t believable that the woman would have a job doing what she was doing. Because it was just almost an impossible task for her to keep up. So just to put somebody in there as a token is really quite silly” (male 70 visual impairment London)

Perceived deficiencies in the portrayal of disabled people on television

Although the portrayal of disabilities and long-standing illness on TV has improved in recent years, many across the research samples still felt that there was room for improvement. Negative examples of inauthentic portrayal were frequently articulated, and these are documented below.

Extreme and negative portrayal

Some disabled people felt that disability can be portrayed in an extreme and negative way, focusing on the difficulties, struggles and emotional experience of having a severe disability to the exclusion of everything else. These disabled participants wanted a more balanced portrayal by including both the negative aspects and the more positive qualities that can come with living with a disability, such as tenacity, determination and achievement.

“It is not all or nothing there is, there are people in the world that function normally but still have a disability” (female 18-34 visual impairment Swansea)

“There was no one I could identify with the disabled part of myself... there’s no one with a normal condition... it’s always an extreme of something so Stacy had extreme mental health and Aiden with mental health and suicide... it’s all to an extreme... they don’t show what it’s like to live day-to-day with a condition” (female 35-54 physical impairment South England)

An over-simplified depiction

Disabilities can be unique, complex and dynamic – there may be degrees of disability on a spectrum that can change over time. The more severely disabled participants within this study reported experiencing good and bad days: their disability can improve or deteriorate over time. As such, they felt that portrayal of life with a disability can be over-simplified and these nuances lacking. For example, some argued that there was too much focus on wheelchair users, particularly within soaps. They theorised that this might be because it is easier than learning about someone with a more complex or hidden disability which needs to be explained to viewers.

“Where you’ve got someone like myself where the condition is sometimes good and sometimes bad there is no correlation... There isn’t a character that is in my position” (female 35-54 physical impairment South England)

A female lone parent with severe anxiety noted the importance of good research when portraying people with anxieties on TV. She said that all too often the portrayal of someone with anxieties can be over-simplified and portrayed in a one-dimensional way.

“I think it is important because everyone deserves an authentic portrayal; no one wants to walk outside and have people think a certain thing about them because all the media does is portray them in one light” (female 35-54 long standing illness Swansea)

Not enough longevity for disabled characters on television

While soaps were frequently judged as performing better than most genres in relation to the portrayal of disabled people, when they feature a storyline about a disability or long-standing illness, this tends to be the focus of the plot for a short period of time. Instead, disabled participants wanted to see more regular incidental portrayal of disabled characters to see how their character lives a normal life, and how their characterisation develops over time.

“They will highlight it and it will be okay, then back in the box again, you know... It is like okay we have done our job now, ...They will not be consistent ... It is disappointing... there is no longevity with any storylines in something like that. I would like to see them as a more permanent fixture. It is real life at the end of the day that they are trying to portray” (male 35-54 physical impairment Belfast)

“Only if a character is in a car crash or an accident and its part of the storyline to be disabled... to see someone as a normal character I can't think of anyone” (male 18-34 physical impairment Swansea)

Too few disabled people being cast in TV roles

Some disabled participants believed that disabled actors playing disabled character roles would help provide a better portrayal that is more recognisable and authentic. However, some of these participants also understood that a barrier to this might be the potential limiting factors of actors having certain types of disability, which might prevent them from being able to commit to long periods of work, such as severely reduced mobility, pain, lack of sleep and/or anxiety. There was a call by some of the more severely disabled participants for broadcasters to openly promote more flexible working conditions for disabled staff and actors to help address this.

“They [disabled people] are a minority group and less able to go and be on TV or have the opportunity... because they are not out and about, and like myself, not working” (female 35-54 long standing illness Swansea)

Positive examples relating to the representation and authentic portrayal of disabled people across genres

Disabled participants discussed positive examples of portrayal across genres, which are outlined below.

Soaps

Soaps were frequently praised for being inclusive and diverse, and tackling issues that other genres might not. For instance, they felt that *EastEnders* (BBC One) has a strong history of tackling difficult subjects related to disabilities and long-term health conditions. The AIDS storyline in the 1980s is a good example of this and the recent storylines on soaps (referenced below) related to mental health. There was also strong appreciation for the helpline telephone numbers frequently seen at the end of soaps in response to a sensitive issue.

Many disabled participants had programmes recommended to them, particularly soap storylines, due to a character having a similar disability to their own. The following examples were put forward of recent storylines within popular soaps that were recommended to them. The storylines were highly regarded by some for being well-researched and authentic in their portrayal:

- *Coronation Street* (ITV) featured a storyline relating to mental health and suicide. The programme was credited with raising awareness and encouraging those affected to seek help.
- *EastEnders* (BBC1) featured a storyline relating to bipolar, which was interesting and relatable to some extent to participants either with bipolar and those who knew people with bipolar.
- *Emmerdale* (ITV) featured a character with testicular cancer, which one participant (a survivor of testicular cancer) could relate to. He claimed this depiction of the illness was well researched and an authentic portrayal of his experience.

“Good reviews on the suicide one [storyline] for Coronation Street... good insight into mental health and suicide and apparently it got fantastic feedback, really good... especially for men... [help to raise] excellent, awareness, you know, [and] gives you a helpline number” (female 35-54 hearing impairment Belfast)

Documentaries

Documentaries were said to play an important role in raising awareness of the experience of being disabled. Some reacted positively to *‘Professor Green: Suicide and me’* (BBC Three), and regarded this programme to be a well-researched, balanced and objective exploration of the different points of view relating to suicide.

“I can’t remember the exact title. I think it was called ‘Suicide and me’... They scientifically researched into it [suicide], so there were a lot of facts. They interviewed people who their job was just to find out why people commit suicide. They interview people who have failed at suicide. It was very factual. It wasn’t opinion based” (female long standing health condition Swansea)

However, some documentaries polarised opinion: while some claimed specific documentaries help to raise awareness, others cited documentaries they viewed as having sensationalist or patronising titles and themes within the content, such as *Things Not To Say To An Autistic Person* (BBC Three).

“It felt like it exists solely to stir the pot and make people mad. Even the name of it, ‘What Not To Say’, you can say whatever you want... asking an ignorant question is still better than complete ignorance. It was almost like it was encouraging people to stay ignorant and I didn’t like that whatsoever” (male 18-34 learning disability Belfast)

Dramas

Some examples were provided of dramas that have portrayed disabled characters authentically. Participants cited dramas which include disabled people, where the disability is

incidental rather than focused. For instance, *Silent Witness* (BBC One) includes a main character cast as a forensic pathology expert (Clarissa) – a wheelchair user with arthrogryposis. Another positive example is *Sherlock* (BBC ONE), where the main character has Asperger syndrome but is portrayed in a mostly positive way.

Quiz and panel shows

Quiz and panel shows were frequently said to be good platforms for disabled people. For instance, *The Last Leg* (Channel 4) was praised for providing incidental coverage of disabilities and positive role models. However, there was a belief that more men than women are represented on these shows and that this needs to be addressed.

“They make jokes and don’t take themselves too seriously, which I like. I can relate to them for obvious reasons” (male 18-34 physical impairment Swansea)

“It’s good for me in a way I don’t really notice... people think that you are held back if you have a disability and I guess people like that show that it is possible” (male 18-34 physical impairment Swansea)

News and current affairs programmes

News programmes were cited for being inclusive and portraying disabled people more successfully. Nikki Fox on *Watchdog* (BBC) was mentioned as an example of a presenter who is inspirational and relatable (she has muscular dystrophy) and seems to receive as much airtime as the other presenters. Eamonn Holmes received praise for being open about his use of a hearing aid whilst presenting.

“He [Eamonn Holmes] came out and gave an interview about being deaf and having to wear an ear piece...good to see that he is being very open about it and making people aware” (female 18-34 hearing impairment Belfast)

Disabled participants expressed a strong desire for a more consistent incidental and focused portrayal of all kinds of disabilities (mild, moderate and severe) and long-standing illnesses across all genres. Some asserted that for this to be achieved, more disabled staff ought to be involved in the production of content and there ought to be more matched casting (disabled actors playing disabled character roles).

Audience assessment of the BBC’s delivery of representation and portrayal

Many participants across the sample felt that the BBC is in a strong position to set the standard among broadcasters in relation to the representation and portrayal of disabled people. This perception may reflect the BBC’s place in the public psyche as the public service broadcaster with a global audience and a strong heritage of providing content for all. Furthermore, the BBC was said to be well known for delivering good quality dramas, documentaries and soaps – the genres which stood out as being good platforms for better representation and portrayal.

“I expect them [BBC] to represent the country [UK] well as it’s on a worldwide level so people from other countries watch BBC” (male 18-34 learning disability South England)

However, when evaluating representation and portrayal of disabilities on TV overall,, the BBC did not stand out as being particularly better than the other main providers. Their rating of the BBC might be influenced by their higher than normal expectations, which means it might receive more criticism as a result.

Channel 4 was often perceived as performing slightly better in relation to representation and portrayal more generally, including that of disabled people, although it was noted that this might be a perception of the Channel 4 brand rather than actual viewing experience, stemming from its reputation for tackling more controversial and taboo subjects.

“BBC One is stiff upper lip. BBC Two... the same... The likes of Channel 4... sort of push the boundaries you know” (male 35-44 long standing health condition Northern Ireland)

Section 5: Women 55+

Summary

Male and female participants of all ages felt that women aged over 55 years are still not represented well on television in the UK. They felt that this is particularly noticeable during evening peak-time viewing.

Many felt that older women seem to face a double layer of prejudice – both sexism and ageism – which is seen in wider society and is reflected on television. The clearest evidence of this is the absence of older women on television across genres.

However, older women tended to focus on what they saw as the under representation and inauthentic portrayal of other people, such as minority ethnic groups, before considering themselves.

When thinking about their own age group, inadequacies in portrayal tended to be more top of mind for them. Concerns were raised in relation to the perceived lack of positive, strong and authentic older female role models in lead prime-time roles, beyond soaps, reality TV and live entertainment. Women were seen to be taking a supporting rather than leading role in panel shows, comedy and sport.

Many argued that expectations regarding looks and appearing youthful seem to be much higher for female presenters.

The BBC was highly regarded among women aged over 55 years and was thought to be performing relatively well in relation to diverse representation and portrayal more generally. Channel 4 was perceived to be performing slightly better than the BBC at representing and portraying minority groups, although this did not extend to the representation and portrayal of older women, due in part to Channel 4's focus on younger audiences.

Introduction

Overall, we found that age was not usually top-of-mind as a defining characteristic for older women when discussing representation and portrayal on TV. Perceptions of when 'old' or 'older' begins were influenced by their own age and whether they were in good health. Many of the women aged over 55 years across our research did not self-identify as 'old' and tended to relate to younger women on TV. These participants described living lives that correlated with the lives of much younger women they knew; lives they believed would not have been enjoyed by previous generations of older women.

This age group perceived themselves to be a new generation of 'older' women with a younger outlook on life and as such, they sometimes found it difficult to find many older female role models on TV they could relate to. However, they felt that this was starting to change with older female characters starting to appear as the lead in dramas such as the BBC's *Happy Valley* with Sarah Lancashire playing Catherine Cawood.

Older women see others as being under-represented or inauthentically portrayed before themselves

Many participants across the research modules agreed that representing older women on television, and including authentic portrayal of them, is important but that it is lacking. Older women seem to be missing from TV, unlike older men. However, many of the older women we spoke to had not previously perceived this imbalance in the programmes they enjoy watching. For instance, their TV viewing diaries often demonstrated a strong reliance on daytime TV and soaps, where older female presenters and characters appeared to have a stronger presence.

Participants tended to put others before themselves or may not have considered representation and portrayal in relation to their own situation before. It might also be that having grown up with TV traditionally dominated by men that they have grown accustomed to this.

"I think we have accepted things the way they were, I think the younger women don't"
(female 45-54 Glasgow)

Older women in this module were more inclined to focus spontaneously on others such as disabled people, and people from minority ethnic and lower socio-economic backgrounds when discussing representation and portrayal on TV. They also expressed concerns about the lack of positive role models for young people, particularly young men on TV.

"Ethnicity [on TV is lacking], I don't think there's enough Black and Asian people on the telly" (female 55+ Wetherby)

They were also concerned that people in lower socio-economic groups were negatively portrayed on TV. Rather than focusing on challenges being overcome against the odds, they argued that people living in deprived areas tend to be demonised in some way, portrayed as benefit cheats, criminals, drug dealers or guilty of some other anti-social behaviour.

"Usually they try to portray the lower social classes as the ones who are being the drunks and the druggies" (female 55+ Glasgow)

"Those on benefits programmes. I think they are patronised and stereotyped" (female 55+ Swansea)

Perceived deficiencies in the representation of older women on television

Many across the research felt that older women face a double layer of prejudice – sexism and ageism – and that this is often reflected on TV generally. Indeed, they felt that the clearest evidence of this is the notable absence of older women on TV across genres.

"I think you become a wee bit invisible the older you get" (female 55+ Glasgow)

"The whole [TV] industry is male dominated" (male 45-54 Liverpool)

Many participants, across the research modules, noticed a lack of older female acting roles on TV generally, outside soaps and a few high-profile dramas, particularly during prime-time evening slots.

“I think we are the minority” (women 55+ Glasgow)

It was frequently mentioned that older female presenters regularly appear in daytime magazine and female-led chat shows such as *Loose Women* (ITV), but less often as guests or presenters in the evening. Whilst there are a small number of exceptions – for instance, Sandi Toksvig on *QI* (BBC Two) and Sue Barker on *A Question of Sport* (BBC One) – the evening TV schedule seems to feature mainly men – for instance, in *Mock the Week* (BBC Two), *Have I Got News for You* (BBC One) and *Room 101* (BBC One).

“But you look at the quiz and panel. There is only one female presenter. Have I Got News for You – male [presenters]” (female 55+ Wetherby)

“You see look at the quiz panel. They’re all men except that one. There should be more women like Sandy Toksvig” (women 55+ Wetherby)

“Well I don’t think they portray women in their 50s at all. I mean there’s very few [female] presenters in their 50s and you know [for] men it is different. I think that there’s plenty [of older men], is there even a [female] newsreader in her mid-50s?” (women 55+ Belfast)

“It is almost like society ... or the TV production companies put a sell by date on women... Have I Got News for You, occasionally they have a woman but it’s more of a male dominated [show]...” (male 55+ Birmingham)

Despite a few notable exceptions, older women were thought typically to be cast in supporting roles, rather than the lead.

“You sort of wonder why? I could not think of anybody [female presenter]... It just seems to be a lot of males [presenting]... I think that also if females are hosting they are co-hosting with a male – not doing their own programmes” (female 35-44 Swansea)

“You seldom see a woman doing a quiz show [alone] do you?” (female 55+ Wetherby)

“When they [older women] are portrayed on TV... they are usually portrayed as someone’s mum... the story is not about them” (female 55+ Glasgow)

Perceived deficiencies in the portrayal of older women on television

Older women asserted that historically women of their age were usually depicted negatively. They referred to the image of downtrodden menopausal characters and ‘apron-clad’ matriarchs wielding control over their families on soaps – such as Annie Sugden in *Emmerdale* (ITV) and Ena Sharples in *Coronation Street* (ITV) – reflecting outdated ideas about how these people used to live their lives. These were characters that the women we spoke to could not relate to.

"It was always one type wasn't it? Poor thing. They used to pat her on the head. There, there. It's only the menopause" (female 55+ Swansea)

"So anyone over a certain age would be regarded as sad and a granny" (female 55+ ABC1 Swansea)

A few women argued that older female characters are not portrayed as sexual in a positive way. Instead, when older women are portrayed in sexualised ways, it is often seen as inappropriate or a negative – such as a predatory character with loose morals whose behaviour leads to negative consequences, or the promiscuous 'super bitch' who has frequently appeared in soaps over the years.

"I do, I think definitely the older you are, the less positive the [portrayal]" (female 55+ Glasgow)

"Or if you [as an older woman] are portrayed as being glamorous, it is usually in a kind of tarty way. And suggest that maybe it's, it is who you know and what you have done to kind of get yourself there" (female 55+ Glasgow)

Participants across the research said that that female guests and presenters seem always to be younger and better looking than their male colleagues. Older women were more forgiving of this. This might be because they have grown up with this attitude historically being prevalent within wider society.

However, after exploring this in detail, most agreed that it is an issue that seems unbalanced and that should be addressed. An example of this was Sir Bruce Forsyth presenting *Strictly Come Dancing* into his 80s alongside a much younger Tess Daley.

"I am thinking of BBC and watching 'Look North', the male presenters are always older than the females. Yes, on 'Look North', the males are about in their sixties or seventies... And the girls are about, what, early thirties?" (female 55+ Wetherby)

"I know there's been a big issue about women news readers in the last year or two, they get to a certain age and get pensioned off, of course they can still do the job just as well" (male 55+ Belfast)

"For every over 50 year old woman, they will bring in another 20 dolly birds of 20 year olds" (female 55+ Glasgow)

It was frequently asserted among men and women across the research that there are lower standards in terms of looks for older men on TV and that they can show visible signs of ageing. Philip Schofield electing not to colour his greying hair whilst presenting *This Morning* (ITV) was cited as an example of this – few could imagine female presenters feeling able to do this.

A few older participants argued that older women on TV face the additional pressure of having to be extremely well qualified to get a part, unlike younger women and older men. An example that emerged of this was the former *Strictly Come Dancing* (BBC One) judge Arlene Phillips, an accomplished and well-known dancer, choreographer, theatre director and talent

scout, who was replaced by the much younger female panel member Alesha Dixon who they felt had no apparent qualifications related to dance.

There was a contradiction in that most asserted that they would like to see more aspirational women on TV with a youthful appearance and outlook on life, yet many across the research also felt it was dangerous to promote these supposed ideals. Some were concerned by what they considered a trend of people on TV – including older women – going to extreme lengths to achieve an idealised and more youthful look.

“I would like to see more women over 55 that are real women. I am fed up looking at people [older women] that have had Botox, that have had lips done, I like to see real people on the TV. I look at people, their foreheads aren’t moving, you know. Look at the lips and I think, the younger generation is growing up watching these people on the TV and aspiring to be that – no!” (female 55+ Glasgow)

Attitudes towards the representation and portrayal of older women across genres

Across the research, some genres - notably reality TV, live entertainment, daytime panel shows, soaps and dramas - were felt to perform better at representing and portraying older women than others – notably comedy and sports.

Reality TV and live entertainment

Reality TV and live entertainment shows such as *Gogglebox* (Channel 4) and *Britain’s Got Talent* (ITV) include members of the public and therefore diversity seems to happen naturally as a matter of course.

Strictly Come Dancing (BBC One) received praise for a relatively recent move towards an all-female presenter line-up. These female presenters (Tess Daly and Claudia Winkleman) are considered to be a little older (to some extent), professional and aspirational.

“I think Strictly Come Dancing is very much a level playing field [now]...I mean you’ve got [an] equal amount of dancers... the men are brilliant and the women are brilliant and then you’ve got the judging panel. I think they’re all on a level playing field” (female 45-54 Birmingham)

Mary Berry (aged 83), the former co-presenter of *The Great British Bake-off* (BBC One), was frequently acknowledged as a strong positive role model for older women, but her appearance also highlighted how few women of Mary Berry’s age are seen on prime-time TV.

Daytime panel / chat shows

A few older women felt that *Loose Women* (ITV) was a positive move towards the inclusion of more “normal looking” older women on TV. Similarly, Davina McCall was cited as a popular presenter who represents a more authentic look they can relate to.

“[Normal] - what your daughter looks like or what your mum looks like” (female 55+ Wetherby)

Soaps

The portrayal of older women in soaps has changed over time to reflect real life changes in how women live their lives, and as previously discussed this portrayal does not always feel authentic. However, despite the problems highlighted previously, soaps were frequently cited as leading the way for the representation of women over 50 years on TV, because family life is one of soap's main characteristics.

"Dramas [and soaps] are normally quite broad with age gaps because they try to relate to a family environment; if you look at EastEnders, Coronation Street and all that kind of stuff it is for families... from babies to old biddies" (male 18-34 Swansea)

Drama

As previously noted, it was frequently acknowledged that older women have started to appear in strong and aspirational, authentic lead roles within popular dramas, for example, Catherine Cawood lead character in *Happy Valley* (BBC One).

"Women are coming through as being stronger and younger even though they are older in biological age" (female 55+ Swansea)

Comedy and panel shows

There were only a few examples of older female comedians cited, particularly those who appear on panels. These included Jo Brand and Sandi Toksvig. A minority of men and women of all ages felt that women are not as naturally talented at comedy and that this could be the reason for their low numbers. Others argued that comedy has historically been the domain of men, with very few female role models to inspire women to move into comedy.

Sport

Sport is viewed as primarily male oriented, and many across the research found this acceptable as it reflects their perception of a larger proportion of men likely to be viewing it. However, there was some acknowledgement of female sports presenters such as Sue Barker on *Question of Sport* (BBC One) having a strong and inspirational presence.

"In sport it's still male dominated" (female 55+ Wetherby)

"I think it's nice that more women are getting into sport...you've got Sue Barker with Question of Sport... when you go to Sky Sports for instance you've even got the women at the grounds reporting on sport" (male 55+ Birmingham)

Audience assessment of the BBC's delivery of representation and portrayal

When thinking about the BBC, participants across the research expressed a need for greater representation of older women on TV in lead and supporting roles, across genres and particularly during the evenings. Some female participants of all ages were keen to see more authentic and updated portrayals without the pressure to always attain an idealised and youthful look.

In their TV viewing diaries, it was clear that these audiences were viewing more BBC content, and claimed it performed relatively well with regards to representation and portrayal, with examples of daytime TV, soaps and dramas provided to explain this positive perception.

However, there was concern that the BBC can resort to tokenism at times. Whilst some appreciate that tokenism can be useful to ensure some representation, including only one woman and several men can look like a strategy to meet a quota, which does not feel like genuine progress. Furthermore, the notable absence of older women during evenings across genres and providers was a cause for concern for many across the research.

A few older women praised BBC Three for being the most experimental channel in relation to representation and portrayal within the BBC portfolio. However, most of these older women were unaware that the channel was still available since its move online.

“I’d say BBC Three covers things like that now, you know. There’s more diversity [compared to other BBC channels]” (female 55+ Wetherby)

The BBC was said to have more of a Southern English bias and London focus by participants outside the South East of England. On the other hand, ITV felt closer to home in many ways for older women in the north. ITV’s regional services and close relationship with local scriptwriters such as Kay Mellor help support this perception. In addition, ITV’s branding felt more accessible compared to the BBC brand which felt more high-brow.

“I always think of the BBC as south” (female 55+ Wetherby)

“I don’t think BBC do anything to relate to Leeds or Yorkshire” (female 55+ Wetherby)

“There is always room for improvement... [the BBC could] gamble more.... and be braver” (female 55+ Glasgow)

Section 6: Nations, regions and communities

Summary

An important part of a participant's identity was the nation and region in which they live and the community that they feel they belong to. This has implications for representation and portrayal on TV.

For many, there was a perception that television at the national and regional level in the UK tends to excessively represent 'hub' locations. At a local level, these hubs were cited as being the major urban areas of Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland, Cardiff in Wales, and Belfast in Northern Ireland, while TV was perceived to focus on London and South East England when broadcast nationally.

Participants valued TV's ability to put their area 'on the map', with shows such as Derry Girls (C4), Keeping Faith (BBC One), and Countryfile (BBC One) cited as achieving this. However, there was a general worry about their nation, region or community being portrayed inauthentically when broadcast UK-wide. These concerns tended to focus on stereotyping and inauthentic accents. The inclusion of local people in the casting and production of content was thought to be an important way to combat this.

Across nations and regions, those living in lower SEG communities also voiced concerns around the way that they thought poverty was trivialised on TV and treated as entertainment rather than authentically depicted.

Although the BBC was praised in the nations for many pieces of local content, it was also perceived at a national level as being overly focussed on London and South East England. Moreover, it was perceived as having a middle-class bias, with Channel 4 cited by some participants as being less establishment and more relatable to lower SEG communities.

Introduction

To gauge opinions from the UK's wide range of nations and regions, this research incorporated eighteen cities, towns and villages in urban and rural areas across England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland.

The research found that where one lives or comes from was important to the identity of participants. This aspect of identity can be multi-layered, with people feeling a strong sense of connection at a macro-level – their nation or region – through to a micro-level – their local community. Participants frequently expressed the opinion that there were cultural differences and personality traits common within their nation, region and local area, with distinctions made between people in different parts of a local area, and between rural and urban areas.

Considering the importance that national, regional and local identity usually had to participants, it is understandable why many frequently emphasised a desire for more proportional representation and accurate portrayal of their nation, region and local area on TV, without reducing complex characteristics to over-simplified stereotypes. Primarily, these

concerns focused on representation and portrayal on TV broadcast UK-wide, although there were also examples of participants feeling under-represented in regionally produced content.

Of central importance in portraying the different levels of people's identity in relation to where they live or come from is balance. Local areas represent an extension of one's self and participants tended to have a lot of pride in connection with these areas and a desire for a true reflection to be broadcast on national TV. We found that having a well-researched and multi-dimensional portrayal that contains negative and positive aspects is essential to achieving accuracy and authenticity. However, many participants outside South East England felt a sense of injustice in how the area they relate to at a macro and micro level has been portrayed on national TV in the past.

In addition, there was a sentiment that TV tends to focus on certain regional and national hubs across the UK, which do not represent the UK in its entirety. Many participants across the nations and regions felt their nation (outside England) and regional identity (outside South East England) were under-represented on TV broadcast nationally. In addition, there were divergences at a micro-level, particularly between urban and rural areas, and in less affluent local communities in relation to representation and portrayal.

Socio-economic grade also emerged as significant in relation to national, regional and local identity. Many from lower socio-economic backgrounds drew connections between the socio-economic status of the area where they lived and the negative way their region and local area have been portrayed on TV.

The powerful role of representation and portrayal of nations, regions and local communities on television

Representation and portrayal relating to nation, region and local community were considered important for a range of reasons, covering both TV's role as a mirror (to see people from my nation/region on screen) and in its role as a window (so that wider society sees my nation/region on TV).

Visibility

Our research found a common desire among participants to see places and people with accents they recognise: these aspects help to drive a sense of connectivity. The relatability of television content is important to people and this is further enhanced when content feels familiar, at both a macro-level (nation or region) and micro-level (local community).

"This is why I like Keeping Faith. I was watching it and it was showing all around Carmarthen and I'd go I've sat on that bench. It was brilliant. It was part of the programme seeing where they were going to go. It was literally all around. It was brilliant"
(female 55+ ABC1 Swansea)

Celebration and pride

The research found that local programmes with local personalities on TV help to drive external perceptions of a nation or region. Our participants felt that it is important for

audiences to see the positive aspects that they take pride in, displayed on TV at a national level. This was demonstrated in the camaraderie participants felt with popular presenters and actors from their nation or region when they appear on TV.

“He [local TV weatherman] is familiar every day and he is a local...because that is where I am from, that is where I was born, so I think it is just that really, he is from where I am from, he is Welsh” (female 35-44 C2D Swansea)

For participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds, there is a similar pride in TV personalities from their communities and background who make it onto the national stage in a positive way.

“Nice whenever somebody is on and you go ‘oh they are from here and they come across well’ (female 18-34 C2D Belfast)

Cultural relevance

For participants, representation on TV was an important means of feeling culturally relevant. Participants who identify as Brummies, Irish, Scottish, for example, wanted their local culture to be seen on TV. Having equal status within the UK was felt to be at the core of this desire for visibility.

“We are all different and we should all celebrate our diversity, differences and cultures really because that is what we are meant to stand for in the UK” (female 35-44 C2D Swansea)

An accurate reflection

This research found that having a true reflection of a participant’s nation, region and community is integral for on-screen portrayal. Of equal importance was to have these areas and residents accurately portrayed with balanced narratives. A strong sense of equality emerged in relation to this, as participants outside South East England also argued that TV should not appear to exclude parts of the nation and should be multi-dimensional in the stories it tells.

Moreover, almost all participants agreed that TV should not reflect an outdated version of a region as this can lead to false perceptions becoming widely ingrained amongst viewers outside that region. The research found that, generally, many participants outside South East England felt under-represented and, when they were seen, the portrayal did not necessarily fit with their experience and knowledge of the area.

“It reflects on us and how the rest of the country feels about us as being from Birmingham and when you travel, when you go on holiday and when people find out you are from Birmingham they quote these programmes” (female 18-34 BC1 Birmingham)

“They [broadcasters] have to be seen to be equal in exposure to everybody” (male 45-54 C2D Dungannon)

Representation of regions on television

Across the nations and regions, participants felt that representation on nationally broadcast TV was important as a way of providing validation for their area and for putting them 'on the map'. The research also found an appreciation from smaller, more rural locations, when their local area appears on the national stage. Some examples of where this has been done well include *Countryfile* (BBC One), *The Yorkshire Vet* (Channel 5) and *Hinterland* (BBC One). This has the added benefit of enhancing an individual's sense of equal status within the UK. Notably, participants from outside these rarely-shown places also enjoy seeing somewhere new. For instance, *Derry Girls* (Channel 4) was praised in Scotland for offering a more diverse representation, despite depicting a Northern Irish city.

"I think it [Keeping Faith] just puts us on the map really. It shows us there is another part to us" (female 55+ ABC1 Swansea)

"If there's like a documentary or something from Northern Ireland, it's normally just played within Northern Ireland. So, nobody else gets to see it, only us" (female 35-44 DE Derry/Londonderry)

"Countryfile is an example of that because they do represent all the country. They go literally around the country, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Wales, England, they go everywhere. And you can see bits of everything" (male 55+ BC1 Colwyn Bay)

However, TV broadcast across the UK was viewed as being too focused on London and the South East England at the expense of other regions and nations.

Furthermore, participants in North Wales and the Highlands felt under-represented (outside nature and wildlife programming) on Welsh and Scottish TV respectively. These participants noted the bias of local TV programming towards the main conurbations at the exclusion of smaller locations. It was felt by some in more rural areas that these urban hubs received more resources and opportunities to produce content, as well as being better covered in news programming.

"There could be much better representation of more rural voices, smaller towns up and down the country, more regional focus" (male 55+ C2D Dumfries)

"The balance [on TV] between the north and south [Wales] is quite a difference" (male 55+ BC1 Colwyn Bay)

"They put their resources into the BBC in Belfast" (male 45-54 C2D Dungannon)

Additionally, sports coverage on TV was an example of where some participants outside England felt that nationally broadcast content did not sufficiently represent their nation.

"I think it [sport] is very much English broadcast and Scotland is quietly left behind" (female 35-44 BC1 Glasgow)

Socio-economic representation

Among participants in lower socio-economic grades, TV felt insular and closed off to people living in less affluent areas around the UK, leading to a degree of dissatisfaction. The BBC in particular was felt to have a very middle-class focus.

"It's been a closed shop for years, hasn't it, the TV world?" (male 45-54 C1C2 Liverpool)

"It [BBC] is too much upper crust, London centred, middle class" (male 45-54 C2D Dungannon)

Perceived deficiencies in the portrayal of nations, regions and communities on national television

A sensitivity around the portrayal of nations, regions and communities emerged in the research. This not only involved how people felt their nation or region tends to be portrayed, but also the topics covered in relation to their local area and characters they identified with. Participants want portrayal to feel authentic and move away from historical and outdated stereotypes towards rounded multi-dimensional depictions. Across the UK (particularly in areas outside South East England), several concerns relating to portrayal were raised:

Negative stereotypes

This perception was particularly strong in the nations and was also evident in regions outside London/South East England. Participants in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales noted how characters from their nation tend to be repeatedly cast as anti-social in some way. For many, it was felt that broadcasters hold outdated and, at times, stereotypical misconceptions about other nations/regions and convey this through their programming. For participants in Northern Ireland, this took the form of depictions of a 'hard man', such as Jimmy McDonald in *Coronation Street* (ITV), while in Scotland and Wales, complaints emerged of being portrayed as drunk and aggressive (Willy from *The Simpsons*) or stupid (*Dirty Sanchez* (MTV), *Gavin and Stacey* (BBC Three)).

"The Scottish person is always drunk and an abusive drunk at that" (male 35-44 ABC1 Inverness)

"Gavin and Stacy - it's all [about] portraying Wales as thick" (female 18-24 C1C2 Aberystwyth)

Importance of behind-the-scenes authenticity

Local writers, directors and producers were identified by some as integral to attaining accurate portrayal. Participants generally seemed acutely aware of whether content has a local dimension to it behind-the-scenes, and they seemed more open to content covering their region when local people were involved.

"If it's produced by Scottish people, Scottish actors, then it feels more authentic, and it feels more acceptable. That is done by a London scriptwriter, and done by a London production company, that's different" (male 18-34 C2D Glasgow)

Inauthentic accents

For some, there were two relevant points that came up relating to the portrayal of local accents on TV broadcast across the UK; firstly, accents being ‘overdone’ when portrayed by somebody from outside their region and, secondly, people from a nation/region outside South East England watering down their accent. Both were presented as examples of poor portrayal and, in the case of the latter, led to some voicing concern that people with certain accents can be restricted from playing certain roles in nationally broadcast TV content.

“[On TV] you get a person who’s not from that culture putting on a really bad accent. Somebody not from Wales might not pick it up but if you are from Wales, you notice that it’s somebody doing a very bad Welsh accent” (male 55+ BC1 Colwyn Bay)

In addition, there were concerns among some participants that content depicting their region is less visible on national TV because of their accents. Specifically, there was the perception that broadcasters produce content elsewhere because audiences outside those regions might have difficulty understanding the accent.

“[With the exception of Derry Girls] there are no TV programmes with people from Derry in it because of the accent” (male 18-34 BC1 Derry/Londonderry)

Low SEG and geographical associations

There was the view outside the South East that TV appears to associate lower SEG communities with areas in the North and the Midlands. Similarly, in the different nations, there were concerns that their area is only on TV to tell a pre-determined story revolving around negative issues related to those who are financially disadvantaged. The contrast between *Benefit Street* (Channel 4) being filmed in Birmingham while *Made in Chelsea* (E4) is filmed in London came to symbolise this for some.

“I think Birmingham has become a go-to place if you want to do a cheap documentary about guns, drugs and gangs – film it in Birmingham. Knock out an hour documentary and we will go to all the rough neck areas on the inner-city suburb and bang, bang there is your programme” (male 35-44 C2D Birmingham)

‘Poverty porn’ and exploitation

Participants from lower socio-economic backgrounds felt that poverty is treated as a source of entertainment by the TV industry.

“[Benefit Street] scraped the bottom of the barrel, the worst in the area like drug addicts, alcoholics and it doesn’t represent us what we are” (male 35-44 C2D Birmingham)

“They [participants in Great British Benefit Handout] got their whole year’s worth of benefits and I felt that was just setting them up to fail... and it kind of seemed like it was just for entertainment value” (male 18-34 DE Inverness)

In Wales, there was a perception that reality TV can be exploitative in their portrayal of their nation, with shows such as *Dirty Sanchez* (MTV) and *The Valleys* (MTV) giving young

people who had viewed it across the UK a false perception of Welsh people and linking them to anti-social behaviour. There was also a socio-economic aspect to this, as some in lower socio-economic groups believed there can be exploitation of lower income families and individuals from deprived areas on shows such as *The Jeremy Kyle Show* (ITV), *Can't Pay, We'll Take it Away* (Channel 5), *Rich House, Poor House* (Channel 5) and *Great British Benefit Handout* (Channel 5).

"[Reality TV] is exploiting [lower SEG people] because they want to be famous" (male 35-44 DE Aberystwyth)

Outdated portrayal

In Northern Ireland, there was a strong sentiment that when Northern Ireland is depicted on national TV, there tends to be too much focus on 'The Troubles'. Moreover, content broadcast locally or nationally that portrays paramilitaries and division was seen as behind the times and regressive. *The Stephen Nolan Show* (BBC One NI), *Ross Kemp: Extreme World* (Sky 1) were both cited as being guilty of displaying paramilitaries and portraying division. *The Fall* (BBC Two) was well received for its representation and portrayal of Northern Ireland in general but was also mentioned as portraying this negative, outdated side of Northern Ireland to some extent.

"The Nolan Show itself, Stephen Nolan, they think of these topics and almost stir the pot" (female 18-34 C2DE Belfast)

"[Ross Kemp documentary] was on all The Troubles and the marching and the bonfires" (female 18-34 C2DE Belfast)

"Even The Fall, they had paramilitaries in it as well, even though it was not the main thing about it" (female 18-34 C2DE Belfast)

Positive examples of authentic portrayal across genres

The research found that portrayal does not need to be positive to be well received by people from different nations, regions and communities. Participants sought multi-dimensional portrayal as they recognise their local identity is complex and can include both negative and positive elements and characteristics. Key to successful portrayal and feeling true-to-life was capturing all the complex nuances that an area and their people have to offer, including landmarks, accents, cultural norms and personality traits of characters.

Dramas

It was acknowledged across the research that some popular dramas have felt authentic in their portrayal of nations and regions, and the examples provided by participants are outlined below.

Hinterland (BBC One) and *Shetland* (BBC One) include areas that are felt to be under-represented on TV, and therefore represent rare opportunities to see certain aspects of life in these areas. These programmes were put forward as being authentic in their portrayal of the communities they depict, and successfully capture subtle nuances such as local

landmarks, and other visual and non-visual cues including accents that local people recognize.

“Peaky Blinders raised Birmingham’s profile because everybody in the country really seemed to love Peaky Blinders and that kind of set a bit of precedence for Birmingham” (female 18-34 BC1 Birmingham)

“Hinterland was brilliant for TV here it was filmed in and around Aberystwyth” (male 35-44 DE Aberystwyth)

“I would say Line of Duty [is authentic] ...I’d say it’s very well researched” (female 45-54 BC1 Belfast)

Line of Duty (BBC One), *Peaky Blinders* (BBC Two), *Keeping Faith* (BBC One) and *The Secret* (ITV) were all said to include multi-dimensional characters that feel authentic. Similarly, for lower SEG participants, Tommy Shelby’s (*Peaky Blinders*) strong connection to his roots helped foster a strong connection with participants in Birmingham.

Having local voices involved in content about their region was believed to be a core component in the development of more accurate and authentic portrayal. This was considered as important in both the foreground and the background, with local writers, directors and producers alongside local actors considered key to attaining accurate depiction of an area. A handful of participants in Yorkshire were particularly enthusiastic about Kay Mellor dramas, as Mellor was considered a good representative of the region, having lived there for many years and was felt to accurately reflect certain aspects and characteristics in her storylines.

“I think we relate to Leeds with Kay Mellor, a lot of dramas... She is from Leeds, so she knows what she is writing” (female 55+ C1C2 Wetherby)

Lifestyle entertainment

For participants in rural areas, having presenters who are familiar with rural matters, such as farming, helped underpin authenticity. Programmes that were well received as covering rural communities were *The Yorkshire Vet* (Channel 5), *Springtime on the Farm* (Channel 5) and *Countryfile* (BBC One). These programmes were cited as being authentic due to the inclusion of a relatable presenter with knowledge of the subject matter.

“Adam Henson, he’s on Countryfile...he’s a farmer and I just can relate to him because I have sheep and cattle of my own and I just think he’s so good at what he does” (female 45-54 C1C2D Dumfries)

Comedy

Comedy emerged as an effective genre at tapping into the positive and negative portrayal of nations, regions and local communities. Local input was considered essential here, as people were more likely to feel resentment at being the butt of someone else’s joke but felt more comfortable laughing at themselves.

“We all see the funny side in our own cultures... it’s good for people to see [that]” (male 45-54 C1C2 Liverpool)

“It is okay to poke fun at ourselves but not have anyone else do it” (male 44-55 ABC1 Glasgow)

The Blame Game (BBC One NI) emerged as an example of local TV in Northern Ireland which poked fun at local matters in a way that people outside Northern Ireland could not do. Familiarity with the personalities was an important component of this and helped to enhance the relatability of the show.

Scottish comedy series *Rab C. Nesbitt* (BBC Two) and Scottish sitcom *Still Game* (BBC One) were both recognised as portraying Scotland negatively at times. However, these shows were made *in* Scotland, *by* Scottish people, and this was said to make a difference to how they were received.

Northern Irish sitcom *Derry Girls* (Channel 4) was celebrated for being an accurate reflection of the place and time it was set.

“[About Derry Girls] It’s just typical of what would happen” (female 55+ C1C2 Dungannon)

The comedy show *Mock the Week* (BBC Two) was put forward by participants from lower SEG communities outside London/South East England as an example of a show that granted them a voice. As a result, this show was perceived as representing and portraying an anti-establishment sentiment that they could relate to.

Current affairs

Having a balanced portrayal was found to be particularly important in current affairs content. *Spotlight* (BBC One) was identified in Northern Ireland as a local programme in this genre that feels high quality and balanced, which helps to make it feel relevant to people. At a national level, *Question Time* (BBC One) was viewed by some as a show that satisfies the different nations and regions as it gives them a fair portrayal in front of a UK-wide audience by travelling around the country and offering a balanced array of local voices which are representative of a variety of opinions. This view was contested by some participants, however, who noted issues with how it portrays the socio-economic makeup of the country. In particular, there was the perception that the panellists were mainly drawn from higher SEG communities.

“Spotlight and all those programs are about Northern Ireland. I think BBC do better on home affairs and politics. The Thursday night politics show [Question Time]” (female 55+ C1C2 Dungannon)

“[With] five different people on [Question Time] each week, there is always someone that I relate to” (male 18-34 DE Exeter)

"In Question Time, I think you will have a lawyer or somebody from Cambridge, and you are thinking to yourself...I want to hear about normal Joe Bloggs" (male 18-34 BC1 Derry/Londonderry)

Audience assessment of the BBC's delivery of representation and portrayal

Though some participants were aware of the BBC's remit to provide locally produced content, its representation and portrayal of the UK's nations, regions and communities was primarily judged by the content that it broadcasts UK-wide. Overall, the research found that the BBC was viewed relatively positively with regard to the representation and portrayal of nations and regions. The presence of dedicated local content was appreciated by participants. BBC NI, BBC Wales and BBC Scotland were perceived as being better at offering news and current affairs programmes at a local level than other broadcasters.

Among the nations, Wales emerged as the most effusive about the BBC. Participants gave numerous examples of BBC content broadcast nationally and filmed in Wales including *Doctor Who* (BBC One), *Casualty* (BBC One), *Keeping Faith* (BBC One), *Hinterland* (BBC One) and *Torchwood* (BBC One). The presence of personalities such as Alex Jones and Huw Edwards were seen as further demonstration of the BBC potentially doing more than other broadcasters for this nation. However, some of our Welsh participants felt that the BBC could cover more of Wales outside Cardiff in its TV output.

"When it comes to programmes based in Wales the BBC is miles ahead of the other broadcasters" (male 18-34 ABC1 Swansea)

"I think the BBC could show more than just Cardiff. You could go a bit further west, not particularly Swansea, but there is St David's and Haverford West. And north Wales as well" (female 55+ ABC1 Swansea)

Some participants expressed concerns about setting quotas for how much local content the BBC should produce. For these participants, the quality of local content was more important than the quantity, particularly when locally produced content is broadcast nationally. This was particularly acute as people felt their local area can be under the microscope for a short period and want it to be portrayed authentically during that time. Programmes such as *The Fall* (BBC Two), based in Northern Ireland, and *Hinterland* (BBC One), based in Wales, were positively received and noted for being authentic and well made.

"I think it has got a lot better over the last couple of years but before I think you would not have seen [Northern Ireland] really. Only on the news" (female 18-34 BC1 Belfast)

"[BBC shouldn't film in NI] if it's only just to fill a quota or if it is just tick boxing, as long as it's decent television" (male 45-54 C2D Dungannon)

As previously mentioned, compared to the other main broadcasters, the BBC was held to a higher standard, and as a result could be viewed more harshly with regard to the representation of nations and regions on national TV. This notion of the BBC focusing too much on a few 'hubs' was also apparent in the more rural parts of the nations. Participants

felt that the BBC focused on Belfast in Northern Ireland, Cardiff in Wales, and Glasgow and Edinburgh in Scotland, leaving those outside those hubs to feel a sense of alienation.

“They [BBC] are not head and shoulders above all the others, but you like to think they should be” (male 35-44 DE Aberystwyth)

“A lot of stuff [on the BBC] is like London, Birmingham, Manchester, what about all the little villages?” (male 35-44 DE Aberystwyth)

Similarly, the research found that the BBC is seen by some as not being inclusive enough of regions outside London/South East England. Off-screen factors were cited as having played a part in driving this perception. Issues around BBC staff resisting a move to Salford, for instance, were mentioned by one participant. Furthermore, there was a sense that other broadcasters, particularly ITV and Channel 5, put more effort into representing northern England through content produced by local writers (e.g. Kay Mellor) or covering local personalities, such as *Made in Yorkshire* (Channel 5), *The Yorkshire Vet* (Channel 5) and *Ant and Dec’s Saturday Night Takeaway* (ITV).

“I don’t think the BBC knows where Birmingham is... They will just go to London or they will go to Manchester” (male 35-44 C2D Birmingham)

“You think of the BBC as originating in London. To me it’s southern” (female 55+ C2D Wetherby)

“Well thinking about that Channel 5 over the last month... [they] seem to have an awful lot about Yorkshire” (female 55+ C2D Wetherby)

“With the BBC, most of the people they offered the positions up north went ‘no, we’re not going to take it” (male 45-54 C1C2 Liverpool)

Outside England, our research found some concerns that the BBC has an ingrained bias against other nations. Sports and news coverage were perceived by some as excessively focusing on England and the BBC was perceived as representing the interests of its English viewers more than other nations’ viewers.

“If an English person wins they’ll say English, but if a Scottish [person] wins they’ll say British, especially BBC” (female 35-44 BC1 Glasgow)

“The BBC tends to be more English based and go English first... Feels like we’re second” (female 45-54 BC1 Belfast)

Additionally, there was a desire for a greater variety of accents to be represented on national TV and for an effort to be made to ensure that accents sound authentic.

“Regional accents we felt were a bit hit and miss. We’ve got the odd one. We could think of an example there which we discussed. But on the whole accents is something that the BBC maybe don’t do as well” (female 45-54 C2D Birmingham)

This reflects the general view amongst participants that the BBC should be inclusive of all parts of the UK, in line with its remit to represent the UK's nations, regions and communities.

Appendix A: Sample details

Main module

AGE	GENDER	SOCIO-ECONOMIC GRADE (SEG)	EXISTING BBC APPROVAL RATING ⁶		LOCATION
18-34	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	-	ENGLAND Birmingham (workshop)
35-44	Male	C2D	Med-high	-	
45-54	Female	C2D	Low-med	-	
55+	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	-	
18-34	Male	DE	Med-high	No ethnic diversity	Exeter
35-44	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	-	Surrey/Greater London
45-54	Male	C1C2	Med-high	-	Liverpool
55+	Female	C2D	Low-med	No ethnic diversity	Wetherby, Yorkshire
18-34	Male	C2D	Med-high	-	SCOTLAND Glasgow (workshop)
35-44	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	-	
45-54	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	-	
55+	Female	C2D	Low-med	-	
18-34	Female	DE	Low-med	No ethnic diversity ⁷	Inverness
35-44	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	-	Dumfries
45-54	Female	C1C2	Low-med	-	
55+	Male	C2D	Med-high	No ethnic diversity	
18-34	Female	C2D	Low-med	Protestant	
35-44	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	Catholic	NORTHERN IRELAND Belfast (workshop)
45-54	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	Protestant	
55+	Male	C2D	Med-high	Catholic	
18-34	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	Catholic	
35-44	Female	DE	Low-med	Protestant	Derry/Londonderry
45-54	Male	C2D	Med-high	Catholic	
55+	Female	C1C2	Low-med	Protestant	
18-34	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high	-	
35-44	Female	C2D	Low-med	-	
45-54	Male	C2D	Med-high	-	
55+	Female	(A)BC1	Low-med	-	
18-34	Female	C1C2	Low-med	-	Aberystwyth
35-44	Male	DE	Med-high	-	
45-54	Female	C2D	Low-med	(50% bilingual English/Welsh)	Colwyn Bay
55+	Male	(A)BC1	Med-high		

⁶ The level of approval of the BBC, defined using a 10-point scale.

⁷ The majority of sessions were designed to be inclusive and to reflect the population of the area where the research was conducted. In a small number of more rural areas some groups with White participants were conducted, reflecting the less diverse populations of those areas and to allow an opportunity within the wider programme for different views about diversity on television to be collected.

Other specifications:

- Workshops 2.5h, c.24 people split into 4 sub-groups; group discussions 2h, c.6-8 people per group in various locations across the nations
- All BBC TV viewers, with mix of weight of viewing (light, medium, heavy)
- Mix of genres/types of content consumed
- Representative mix of life-stage by age group, mix of employment statuses
- Diverse representation reflective of region, with c.2 minority ethnic people in appropriate sessions
- All have lived in the UK for at least 5 years and speak/write fluent English
- May include speakers of local language in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, but sessions conducted in English
- Included some female lone parents
- Mix of rural and urban residents across sample

People from a minority ethnic background

ETHNICITY & RELIGION	GENDER	AGE	SOCIO-ECONOMIC GRADE (SEG)	OUTLOOK	LOCATION
South Asian Bangladeshi/Pakistani Muslim	Male	18-34	(A)BC1	Less traditional (probably 2nd/3rd generation)	Glasgow
South Asian Bangladeshi/Pakistani Muslim	Female	55+	C2D	More traditional (probably 1st generation)	Birmingham
South Asian Indian Hindu/Sikh	Female	35-54	C2D	Less traditional (probably be 2nd generation)	Glasgow
South Asian Indian Hindu/Sikh	Male	55+	(A)BC1	More traditional (probably 1st generation)	Leicester
Black E & W African (Somalian, Kenyan Sudanese, Eritrea East) & (Nigerian - West), Muslim	Female	18-34	C2D	Less traditional (probably 2nd/3rd generation)	London
Black Sub-Saharan African (S African, Nigeria and Ethiopia), Christian	Male	35-54	(A)BC1	More traditional (probably 1st/2nd generation)	London
Black African Caribbean Christian	Female	55+	C2D	More traditional (probably 1st generation)	Nottingham
Black African Caribbean Christian	Male	18-34	C2D	Less traditional (probably 2nd/3rd generation)	Bristol

Other specifications:

- Groups 2h, c.8 people per group
- All BBC TV viewers, with mix of weight of viewing (light, medium, heavy)
- Mix of genres/types of content consumed
- Representative mix of life-stage by age group, mix of employment statuses
- All have lived in the UK for at least 5 years and speak/write fluent English

LGBT people

LGBT	COMING OUT JOURNEY	AGE	LOCATION
Gay men	Out and established	18-55+	Liverpool
Lesbian	Out and established	55+	Glasgow
Bisexual (female)	Recently out	18-34	London
Gay man (one)	Recently out	18-34	London
Gay men (pair)	Recently out	18-34	London
Lesbian	Not yet fully out/ partially out	18-34	London
Bisexual (male)	Not yet fully out/ partially out	18-36	Glasgow
Transgender men	-	18-34	London
Transgender woman (one)	-	18-34	London

Other specifications:

- Mostly mini-group triads 1.5-2h, 3 per triad (some with fewer or more people)
- Sessions split by how the individuals self-identify (Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender)
- All BBC TV viewers, with mix of weight of viewing (light, medium, heavy)
- Mix of genres/types of content consumed
- Representative mix of life-stage by age group, mix of employment statuses
- Allow recruitment of friendship groups
- All have lived in the UK for at least 5 years and speak/write fluent English

Disabled people

DISABILITY	LOCATION
Sensory impairment – visual 1 x participant with peripheral vision in one eye (after a stroke) – mild-moderate 1 x participant born without sight in one eye – severe	London/ South East, Swansea
Sensory impairment – hearing 1 x participant with a hearing aid – moderate 1 x participant with hearing impairment – severe and signer present at the interview	Belfast, London/ South East
Physical impairment/mobility issues 1 x participant with arthritis – mild 1 x participant with a long-term reoccurring disability / rare condition that affects growth and mobility – severe 1 x participant with Scoliosis ataxia, uses a mobility scooter – severe 1 x participant who had a stroke which affected mobility – moderate	Belfast, London/ South East, Swansea
A learning disability (neuro diversity/ cognitive) (NOTE: Not to be confused with a specific learning difficulty such as dyslexia or attention-deficit disorder (ADD)) 2 x participants with autism – mild-moderate 1 x participant with epilepsy – mild	Belfast, London/ South East, Swansea
A long-standing illness / health condition 1 x participant with a long-term chronic illness, anxiety and depression – moderate 1 x participant with a spinal condition which affects mobility – moderate 1 x participant who had survived testicular cancer which caused permanent nerve damage - was severe and now mild 1 x participant with idiopathic intracranial hypertension – severe	Belfast, London/ South East, Swansea

Other specifications:

- Depth interviews each lasting about 75 mins at the participant’s home; some interviews included a carer/interpreter
- All BBC TV viewers, with mix of weight of viewing (light, medium, heavy)
- Mix of genres/types of content consumed
- Representative mix of life-stage by age group and SEG, mix of employment statuses
- All lived in the UK for at least 5 years and speak fluent English
- The researcher visiting the participant’s home contacted the participant in advance using their preferred means of contact to establish a relationship and help the participant to mentally prepare for the interview in advance by thinking about their TV viewing

Appendix B: Research documents

Most participants across the samples prepared for the research sessions by completing a TV viewing diary online and chose two people or characters on TV that they could relate to, in advance of the sessions. This provided a route to explore the complex topic of representation and portrayal on TV.

Participants were also invited to post thoughts on what was discussed during the sessions on a private online platform after the session.

Pre-task

Hello and welcome to this study!

Before we meet you in person, we'd like to find out more about you and what you watch on TV. This task has 2 parts, each of which should be easy to complete:

Part 1: TV viewing diary – please note down what you view, when you view it, and what you like and/or dislike about it. Please complete this diary for 5 days – try to include at least 3-4-week days plus Saturday &/or Sunday.

Part 2: Relating to people on TV – choose two TV programmes that you've enjoyed watching – one from the BBC and one from another channel or service (e.g. from ITV, Channel 5, Netflix). Please tell us about a person or character that you relate to in each programme and explain what makes you feel that way.

Your chosen people or characters can be fictional (e.g. someone in a drama, a sitcom or a soap opera) or real.

Please also find an image of each person/character and bring them to the session so that we can discuss them.

Here are some examples:

Lesley is taking part in our research and is 75 years old. These are her two examples.

1) I enjoy watching Casualty (BBC One). I admire Duffy, who has been a nurse in the show for many years, because she's a strong but caring character. Duffy has had her ups and downs over the years, but always manages to pull through. In many ways I feel Duffy's life is a reflection of my own. I feel Duffy is a great role model for women like me.

2) I also liked the main character Laura in Liar (ITV). I can relate to the frustrations of not always being listened to and believed. I might not approve of everything the character did (although it was a great drama to watch), but it did show that women can face difficult situations. I think it's important to have strong female characters on TV so that women aren't ignored.

Abdul is taking part in our research and is 29 years old. These are his two examples.

1) Luther (Netflix) is a show I've always enjoyed watching and I'm really excited for the new season. It moves at a fast pace so I always end up binge-watching it. The main character, DCI John Luther, is captivating. It's good to see a strong lead male from a more diverse background than usual, especially Idris Elba as he's always great at adding complexities to the characters he plays – he'd be great as the next James Bond!

2) The One Show (BBC One) – Matt Baker is a great presenter with a warm and friendly personality, and he seems very genuine and down to earth. We enjoy watching The One Show as a family and I feel that the presenters are good role models for my kids. It's also good to hear a northern accent on TV as I'm originally from Newcastle.

PART 1: TV viewing diary

For this first task, we'd like you to complete a diary of all the times you view something over 5 days. Please include at least 3-4 week days (e.g. Monday, Weds and Friday) and 1-2 weekend days (Sat &/or Sun).

For each day, we'd like you to note down:

- Time viewed: e.g. 8pm – 8.30pm
- Programme: e.g. EastEnders
- Channel / service: e.g. BBC1, iPlayer or Netflix etc
- What you like / dislike about the programme viewed: e.g. I like that the show includes characters I can relate to

We've provided an example below of a completed diary for one day. Please complete a diary for your viewing in a similar style for a minimum of 3-5 days. Please feel free to use extra paper if you need to.

EXAMPLE			
Day 1 – Date: Friday 27th April 2018			
Time viewed	Programme	Channel / service	What I like and / or dislike about this programme
7.10 - 7.40am	Everybody loves Raymond	Channel 4	I like to have this programme on while I'm getting dressed. It energises me in the mornings. I can relate to the wife in the story – her character makes me laugh.
8 - 8.30pm	EastEnders	BBC1	I'm enjoying the storyline at the moment and there are some serious issues that are covered in an entertaining and thought-provoking way.
10 - 11pm	Game of Thrones	Sky Atlantic	My husband and I love this. It's gripping. It's great for Friday night viewing – better than a movie! But it can be too intense and graphic at times.

PART 2: Relating to people on TV – please answer the following questions in the spaces provided below.

Choose two TV programmes that you've enjoyed watching – one from the BBC and one from another channel or service (e.g. from ITV, Channel 5, Netflix). Please tell us about a person or character that you relate to in each programme and explain what makes you feel that way.

Your chosen people or characters can be fictional (e.g. someone in a drama, a sitcom or a soap opera) or real.

Please also find an image of each person/character and bring them to the session so that we can discuss them.

- Programme:
- Channel:
- Person/character:

Don't forget to bring your images and this booklet with you to the session. Thank you!

Discussion guide

Background, objectives, notes and glossary are appended – see R&P framework

1. WAITING ROOM (5 min)

- Check pre-task completed and available – they will need to refer to it during the session
- Collect **PRE-TASK IMAGES** and put up on flipchart on wall in group room
- **SELF-COMPLETION A** questionnaire (to capture profile of total sample achieved in the project across all characteristics, even where quotas not set and characteristics not asked about at recruitment stage for some sessions)
- Workshop moderators to agree time to reconvene in plenary

2. INTRODUCTION (5 mins)

- Workshops: general introduction in plenary, then respondent introductions within groups
- Introduction to moderator & Kantar
- Explain research: we're researching television, as you know from the task you've done
- Interested in your opinions – no right/wrong answers, want an open and honest conversation
- Confidential, except for some filming at the end [ADJUST TO SESSION]
- Recording audio/video, viewing [ADJUST TO SESSION]
- Speak one at a time
- Mobiles off/silent
- Duration [ADJUST TO SESSION] workshop 2½h, group 2h, triad 1½h, in-home depth 1¼h
- We also want to capture some comments on camera at the end that will be used to help bring our report to life [ADJUST TO SESSION]
- Check all have their completed pre-task
- Respondent introductions (in pairs, then to room):
 - First name, family status, occupation
 - TV services (pay or non-pay TV, on-demand services)

3. TV VIEWING (15 mins)

Warm up and set a context to frame subsequent discussion. Ensure everyone speaks in this early stage to encourage a productive dynamic. Throughout the session, refer to the pre-task diary to explore perceptions and expectations of R&P to ensure discussion is grounded in specific examples – we want the examples and illustrations to come as much as possible from participants. This section is important for spontaneous comments that will build an understanding of TV consumption.

- Warm-up: let's start by talking about TV – what have you been watching over the past week
 - What were the best programmes on TV, what did you like about them
 - What were you looking forward to watching, why
- Capture examples from everyone in turn (refer to **DIARIES**) and probe
 - Name of prog, channel, time
 - What did you like about it, how did it make you feel
 - Capture examples across channels & genres, one-offs vs regular favourites

- General discussion: what makes a prog good, what's important to you – probe beyond the story/information to get towards characters/people to help foreground R&P factors in their minds (because we don't want to be side tracked by the content of progs they like)

4. PEOPLE AND PLACES ON TV (20 mins)

*Use the pre-task images, supplemented by the programmes people have viewed noted in their media diaries, to explore perceptions that will provide a point of reference for subsequent discussions of portrayal of people and places shown on TV. Be careful to follow their language, which might not include 'representation' and 'portrayal' in the way we mean them. e.g. 'people you relate to on TV' (portrayal), 'how people are reflected on TV' (portrayal), 'how people are represented on TV' (portrayal), 'people you see/don't see on TV' (representation), 'how much you see different types of people on TV' (representation), 'diversity'. What about where you live? This section needs to be treated sensitively because we might get very personal comments. Steer towards characteristics we're investigating. **NB nation/region is very important***

- Let's turn now to your **IMAGES** (see exhibition) – ask a few to explain their two images
- Who have you selected, prog/channel
- Why, what is it about this person/character that appeals/like etc – ladder beyond prog/content to the person
 - e.g. if it's a drama you like, what is it about this character in the drama, how does s/he make you feel, what does s/he represent for you
 - e.g. if it's a non-fiction presenter/host, what is it about this person that appeals, what does s/he mean to you
- Explore some fictional characters (drama, soap, sitcom) and some real people (presenters etc)
 - What is important about this person/character – probe visible and hidden characteristics (appearance, personality, experience/knowledge)
 - How important, why (identification, inspiration, aspiration, visibility, status)
- Review the exhibited images as a group
 - What are the themes/common threads across all these characters/people, the aspect you relate to – collect factors on **FLIPCHART B**
 - Probe other diversity issues (**CHARACTERISTICS BOARD**) – how important is the gender, age, social class, nation/region, ethnicity, sexuality, disability of this character/person
 - How well does this collection of images reflect all of you here today (identity), how well do you relate to them, how important are they to you
 - Are there some of you here that disagree with any of the choices – i.e. don't engage with/like/relate to any of the people shown here, why
 - What does the outside world see
 - How easy was this task (this might uncover more)
- Probe also on TV programmes watched in the past week (viewing diary – to contextualise the role of people/characters and places in their viewing choices)
 - Similarly, what programmes have you watched in the past week where there's a person/character that you relate to – probe
 - Explore role of location – how important is it that your city/region/nation is shown on TV (represented/portrayed well)
- Think back 5-10 years – how have the people you see on TV changed, if at all

- Did you see people like this on TV back then, if not what's changed
- Probe fictional characters (in drama, soap, sitcom)
- Probe real people (host, presenter, correspondent, commentator, panellist)
- Has TV got better / stayed the same / got worse at diversity, at having people in progs that you relate to

5. PORTRAYAL (40 mins)

Explore portrayal (how people and characters are depicted on TV) by genre and by channel (focusing on the BBC but with reference to other broadcasters) and be sure to explore BBC). Explore how it is done well (including unpacking what authenticity means) as well as poorly, and probe on the cues that drive these perceptions. Remember that participants might identify through multiple characteristics. Use stimulus to explore deep, and be careful not to impose our preconceptions. Collect examples of R&P done well/poorly by BBC & other broadcasters.

- How do the people you relate to on TV tend to be portrayed, how do they come across
- Explore by genre – show **BBC GENRE BOARDS** in turn – let's think about <genre>...
 - Capture examples of portrayal done well/poorly – prog & channel (BBC & others), refer to diary examples for focus
 - Collect factors on **FLIPCHART B** for later BBC evaluation section
 - DRAMA, SOAP, SITCOM: actor, character, storyline context
 - PANEL/CHAT SHOWS, LIFESTYLE ENTERTAINMENT: host, panellist/participant
 - NEWS, SPORT, CURRENT AFFAIRS, DOCUMENTARY: presenter, reporter, interviewee, commentator, pundit
- What are the signs/cues when it's done well, what makes it authentic (e.g. rounded, feels real, complex, relatable, inspirational, aspirational, lead character) – **FLIPCHART B**
 - Probe authenticity – what makes a person/character authentic
- What are the signs/cues when it's done poorly, what makes it feel inauthentic (e.g. unrealistic, tokenistic, stereotype, marginalised, patronising, belittling)
- Make comparisons across genres
- What do you expect from the BBC – probe by genre
- Who is more likely/tends to be portrayed well
- Who is more likely/tends to be portrayed poorly
 - **CHARACTERISTICS BOARD** – probe:
 - Gender
 - Age/life-stage
 - Social class
 - Nation/region
 - Urban/rural
 - Ethnicity
 - Sexuality
 - Disability
- How well do you feel you are portrayed?
- How well do you feel your city/region/nation is portrayed on screen?
- When does portrayal matter greatly vs matters little (NB authentic portrayal is likely to be more important in some genres and for some audiences)
- Portrayal that is incidental (identity reflected) vs overt (topic covered)

- e.g. a news reporter who happens to be in a wheelchair vs a documentary about disabled people
- e.g. a soap that includes South Asian characters vs a storyline about the experience of being British South Asian
- What are the milestone programmes from the past where portrayal was done well?
- What are the examples from the past where it was done poorly

6. REPRESENTATION (15 mins)

Representation (the extent to which people and characters appear on TV) will likely be covered more quickly than portrayal because perceptions will be dependent upon what participants have watched on TV, and the two concepts might be conflated. Nevertheless, we need a sense of participants' perceptions.

- We've been talking about how people come across/are portrayed on TV and how you relate to them – now let's talk about who you do or don't see on TV...
 - Allow some spontaneous comments based on discussion so far
- Thinking about the people/characters you relate to (**IMAGES**) and your identity, how often do you find people/characters like this on TV
 - How important is that to you
 - Who would you like to see more of
 - Who is missing – **CHARACTERISTICS BOARD**
- Which genres do better/worse – show **GENRE NAMES** (drama, soap, sitcom, panel/chat show, lifestyle ent, news, sport, current affairs & docs)
- Where does it matter more/less
- Probe also on your city/region/nation
 - How important is it to you that it's represented on screen
 - Where is it missing, in which genres does it matter more
- I want you to imagine something now – imagine an **ALIEN**/someone from another country arrives here and wants to learn about people in the UK by watching TV...
 - What impression would it get of the people living here
 - Who would it see, who's missing
 - Generally what kind of UK do you feel is reflected on TV
 - How well do you feel you are reflected on TV
 - What aspects/characteristics of you are reflected (e.g. age, gender, region), what if anything is being missed (NB region is very important for reporting!)
 - Which channels/broadcasters are doing well, which doing less well
 - Note perceptions of how well BBC is doing
- How important is it that you are represented on TV, why
 - Spontaneous comments then probe
 - Identification – creating a sense of self by seeing other people like you
 - Visibility – being seen by others/society
- Thinking about other people: who is well represented on TV, who is not well represented
- How well do you feel <characteristic> are represented – **CHARACTERISTICS BOARD**
 - Probe WOMEN/MEN, YOUNGER/OLDER
 - Probe YOUR NATION/REGION
 - Probe BAME, LGBT, DISABLED PEOPLE

7. BBC PERFORMANCE & ADVICE (20 mins)

Assess BBC R&P performance, and explore what could be improved. Draw on the whole discussion to summarise the points raised and consolidate the main learnings.

Explain the BBC's duties – **READ OUT/BOARD**:

The BBC is a public service broadcaster and operates under a broadcast licence, which sets out some duties. One of them is “To reflect, represent and serve the diverse communities of all of the United Kingdom’s nations and regions in its output and services. In doing so, the BBC should accurately and authentically represent and portray the lives of the people of the United Kingdom.”

Explain: This is about how you relate to the people you see on TV and how TV reflects you. It's also about how TV shapes the way you perceive other people. TV can be both a mirror reflecting you, and a window showing you different people.

- Let's focus now on the BBC and think about how well you feel it's doing in terms of portrayal – refer to **FLIPCHART B** of portrayal cues (framework for evaluation)
 - Allow some spontaneous comments based on discussion so far
 - Refer to examples of progs already mentioned
 - How important is it to you that the BBC shows all types of people in the UK
- Let's think about different types of prog/genres – show **BBC GENRE BOARDS** in turn (Drama & Soaps; Comedy; Lifestyle Entertainment; News & Sport; Current Affairs & Documentaries)
 - How well do you feel the BBC is doing
 - Where is it doing portrayal well, where less well
- **SELF-COMPLETION C** (considered opinions about performance of R&P across all BBC channels and competitors, consumer & citizen perspectives)
 - How does the BBC compare with other broadcasters
 - Which BBC channels do you feel are doing portrayal well, which less well – show **BBC CHANNEL LOGOS BOARD**
 - Which broadcasters do you feel are doing portrayal well, which less well – show **LOGOS BOARD** (ITV, Channel 4, Channel 5, Sky) – who can the BBC learn from, why, what are they doing

Workshop: reconvene in plenary

- Each group explain portrayal images, who is portrayed well/poorly
- Who is represented (visible), who is not (invisible)
- How is the BBC doing, for whom/which audiences – probe genres, channel
 - Probe nation/region (very important for reporting!)
- How are others doing (ITC, C4, C5, Sky), for whom/which audiences – probe genres
 - Who can the BBC learn from
- **All sessions: FLIPCHART (STOP, START, CONTINUE)** – let's draw some lessons for the BBC in terms of the people it shows on TV and how they're portrayed...
 - What should it stop doing; What should it start doing; What should it continue doing
- **HAND OUT PAPER & PENS:** if you were a teacher writing a report card, what comment would you make about the BBC's performance in terms of R&P
 - What do you expect of the BBC in terms of representation and portrayal

- How well do you feel you're portrayed on BBC TV
 - Where does R&P need to improve (of you, of others – who), in what way
- Disclose the regulator **Ofcom** as the commissioner of this research – Ofcom is the UK's broadcasting and communications regulator and has recently become the regulator of the BBC
- **POST-TASK** – please return to the online task and add your advice for the BBC about how it shows people on TV or any other comments you want to make that you've not shared today
- Capture **FILMED COMMENTS** (and signed consent form for public use of footage)
 - 1. What is the main lesson for the BBC from today's discussion
 - 2. How important is it to have people on TV that you can relate to
 - 3. Examples where it's done well and not so well, what makes portrayal authentic
 - 4. How does it vary across genres/types of programme, where does it matter more
 - 5. Who do you think is not portrayed very well, or isn't represented on TV
- Thank and close group; collect pre-task & session tasks