Chapter 2: Representation

Following the work of many previous scholars who have emphasised the primacy of 'race' and ethnicity as a marker of identity (e.g. Entman and Rojecki, 2000; Holtzman, 2000; Jacobs, 2000; Downing and Husband, 2005), this chapter considers research that has examined media representations of ethnicity which we would correspondingly assume should have influenced the self-identities of participants within the present study. The chapter begins with a discussion of a number of studies that propose that media representations of 'race' and ethnicity are constructed in accordance with dominant ideological positionings which serve to shape and control how individuals understand others', and their own, identities. This is followed by an examination of theoretical work on ethnic minority media representations which suggest that issues relating to under-representation and stereotyping remain an ongoing concern within popular culture. Finally, the chapter outlines how ethnic minority groups are engaging with and using the media to create 'new ethnicities'. Although much of the literature discussed relates to the 1980s and 1990s, these studies remain seminal works which continue to inform thinking in this area.

2.1 Ideology and Representation

In his influential essay *The Whites of Their Eyes: Racist Ideologies and the Media* (1981) Stuart Hall proposes that the media, as a principal form of ideological dissemination, produces representations of the social world via images and portrayals. This manufactures a network of understanding that informs us 'how the world is and why it works as it is said and shown to work' (p. 11). Furthermore, he claims that we construct our understanding within an ideology, we 'speak through' ideology and that ideology enables us to 'make sense' of our social reality and our position within it. Hall asserts that ideologies become 'naturalised' and ideologically motivated representations mask themselves as 'common sense'; within an ideology, politically constructed representations – such as representations of 'race' – are conveyed as being 'given by nature'. This argument maintains that institutional representations enable us to classify the world in a system of categorisations of 'race'. Hall suggests

that these categorisations are grounded in a series of alleged 'essential' characteristics that reinforce the naturalisation of such representations further. Thus, in Western societies the dominant white ideology naturalises its existence to such a degree that it renders itself 'invisible', yet remains a pervasive controlling force: as Hall reminds us, 'The "white eye" is always outside the frame – but seeing and positioning everything within it' (p. 14).

In agreement with Hall, a significant body of research suggests that the media, as a key transmitter of representations and as a major source of information within society, has the power to control and shape attitudes and beliefs held in the popular imagination (e.g. Cohen and Gardener, 1982; Ferguson, 1998). This is of particular relevance with regard to attitudes, beliefs and understandings concerning 'race'. For example, research by Karen Ross (1992) on white perceptions of ethnic minorities on television demonstrates that attitudes of whites towards non-whites are influenced by media representation. Her study revealed that although the white participants acknowledged stereotypical representations of ethnic minorities on television, they continued to attribute negative characteristics to ethnic minorities in real life. Ross therefore concludes that for a majority of white people who do not have direct experience of black culture, their attitudes will be grounded exclusively on media representations:

> [F]or the white viewer, s/he knows about other white people through personal, first-hand experience as well as via media sources. S/he knows that the white deviant personality is not the norm, that most white people are law-abiding, child-loving, kind and caring individuals. S/he knows rather less, however, about ethnic minority communities and must rely much more on secondary experiences, most often vicariously derived from television (p. 31).

Thus, Ross' study indicates that the media play a key role in attitude formation as they select information the public receive, and that selection is ideologically motivated. Ross with Peter Playdon (2001) continued to develop this theme, stating 'If most media products are inscribed with the same set of cultural assumptions (and prejudices) because their producers share the same cultural experiences, then those underlying norms and values which may well be hidden but nonetheless exist, are

transmitted as an un-selfconscious truth' (p. xii). Therefore in this formulation, images of 'blackness' do not represent the social reality of being black, rather they position us into a 'way of thinking about blackness' (*ibid*.). Although Ross and Playdon note that different representations vary in their 'accuracy', they maintain that all representations are culturally constructed and positioned in a specific historical context.

Expanding on the issue of the media's determination of representations, Oscar Gandy (1998) proposes that the mass media are understood to be the most important shaper of contemporary society, usurping the role previously held by church, state and school, as directors of public understanding, thus becoming society's primary socialising agent (p. 24). However, he adds the media themselves do not have unlimited control over representation, as media products must comply with the requirements of advertisers, policy makers and the audience. He claims, therefore, that media images of 'race' do not reflect an accurate portrayal of the spectrum of black culture, and that these representations are those which comply with dominant ideological and economic imperatives.

The preceding theorists suggest that media representations are neither objective nor democratic, as not all groups in society are equally represented. Ethnic minorities, in particular, are marginalised by a white ideology that naturalises itself as 'common sense' and the norm. Specifically, Hall (1990) argues that the methods in which black people and their experiences are represented and subjugated under white ideology is not only a result of political and economic agendas, but also, in accordance with Edward Said's (1978) principle of Orientalism, functions to construct blacks as 'Other'. Furthermore, Hall claims that the insidious and 'invisible' nature of this ideology leads black people to understand *themselves* as 'Other':

> It is one thing to position a subject or set of peoples as the Other of a dominant discourse. It is quite another thing to subject them to that 'knowledge', not only as a matter of imposed will and domination, by the power of inner compulsion and subjective conformation to the norm (1990, p. 52).

Therefore, as Hall demonstrates, representation not only affects the understanding of ethnic minority groups within society as a whole, but also how ethnic minority groups come to perceive their own identities. On this issue we must consider that identity is constructed *within* a cultural framework, as Kathryn Woodward (1997) says, 'Identities are produced, consumed and regulated within culture – creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might adopt' (p. 2). We must also consider Hall's (1990) notion that identity is not necessarily 'fixed', but a fluid phenomena; 'Perhaps instead of thinking of identity as an already accomplished historical fact … we should think, instead, of identity as a "production", which is never complete, always in process, and always constituted within, not outside, representation' (p. 51)

2.2 Stereotyping

Establishing that the media have the power to dictate which representations of ethnic minorities are chosen and circulated in the public arena, research into minority representation has revealed two fundamental issues underlying the area: under-representation and stereotypical representation. It is suggested that through such representations, ethnic minorities continue to be subordinated in accordance with white ideological hegemony (see hooks, 1992). This is investigated by Hall (1997) who observes that although negative representations are circulated by contemporary media forms, they have been intrinsic in the development of contemporary Western culture. Hall demonstrates this case in discussing how black people became essentialised in terms of Enlightenment values, constructed from a hierarchy of racial categorisation which was intrinsic to Enlightenment thinking. In this system Hall notes how 'white' became synonymous with civilisation, 'black' with nature, identifying that physical features of black people were seen as semiotic indicators of underdevelopment and 'naturalness'. In such a system, blacks were 'reduced to a few essentials, fixed in Nature by a few, simplified characteristics' and 'were reduced to the signifiers of physical difference' (p. 249), promoting the concept of stereotypical representation which entered popular discourses of the Enlightenment and colonial periods. His argument maintains that these Eurocentric principles have remained within contemporary discourses and underpin current representations of 'race'. For

example, Ross (1996) identifies how stereotypical images of black people which were articulated in early film – 'such as the happy slave, the noble savage and the entertainer' (p. xxii; see also Bogle, 1994) – were adopted and perpetuated by television. She suggests that these representations conformed to white viewers' preconceptions of black people, 'of what blacks were and how they should behave' (1996, p. 89). Furthermore, Ross claims that ethnic minorities are subjugated by media representations as, not only programme content, but specific perspectives and issues portrayed are dictated and chosen by white controllers. Thus, she states, stereotypical portrayals of ethnic minorities in the media bind ethnic minority representation in a system that prevents the development of ethnic minority characters and experience beyond the established stereotypes.

However, whilst Ross acknowledges that some '"improvements" in images of black people in television' (p. 113) and popular film had been made throughout the 1980s, as Andrew Pilkington (2003) asserts 'such grudging admissions … downplay the growth in both the volume and range of representations of minority ethnic groups' (p. 190) exemplified by texts such as the film *My Beautiful Laundrette* (dir. Stephen Frears, 1985), the black sitcom *Desmond's* (C4, 1989-1994) and Asian sketch show *Goodness Gracious Me* (BBC, 1998-2000). Therefore such representations 'expands the *range* of racial representations and the *complexity* of what it means to "be black" [or Asian], thus challenging the reductionism of earlier stereotypes' (Hall, 1997, pp. 272-273, original emphasis). Nevertheless, these images of ethnic minorities remain contentious and problematic, illustrated by Farzana Shain's (2003) critique of the film *East is East* (dir. Damien O'Donnell, 1999) in which she argues '*East is East* … was hailed as a success for race relations but … reproduces familiar themes associated with the cultural pathology discourse of domestic violence, domineering fathers, passive Asian women and the East/West culture clash' (p. 4, see also pp. 5-7).

2.3 Race Relations

The role of television was particularly pivotal in the dissemination of cultural representations of black people in British society, as the medium's growth coincided with post-war immigration. In her analysis of representations of black and Asian

people on television, Sarita Malik (2002) illustrates how documentaries of the 1950s and 1960s contributed to the positioning of black people within the media as a social 'problem'. Malik links this with a number of factors including: changes in technology that freed programme makers from the studio and allowed them to film on location; the ideals of the Reithian project to educate and inform; and the liberal humanist agenda of social realist producers, who aimed to make sympathetic documentaries on 'race issues' with the aim of facilitating black assimilation into 'British' culture. This is of particular significance as integration and assimilation of 'immigrants' was to become the central theme of race relations policy. However, Malik's analysis reveals that the specific issues these programmes focused on – such as 'arrival', 'employment', 'housing', 'crime', 'miscegenation' and 'overcrowding' (p. 30) – in effect, framed blacks as social problem from their inception by reinforcing the binary of 'them' (blacks) and 'us' (whites).

The theme of 'black as problem' is not contained exclusively within 'factual' programming, but paralleled in comedy, as Marie Gillespie (2002) illustrates. Using Andy Medhurst's (1989) analysis of comedy in which he states that 'one of comedy's chief functions … is to police the ideological boundaries of a culture, to act as a border guard on the frontiers between the dominant and the subordinate, to keep laughter in the hands of the powerful' (p. 16), Gillespie demonstrates how comedies of the 1960s and 1970s reflected anxieties over assimilation by integrating antagonisms between black and white characters as central components of the narrative. She proposes that this not only positioned blacks as a 'problem', but also as a 'threat' to national unity. For Gillespie, these positionings were a consequence of larger political concerns – most notably those voiced by Enoch Powell in his (in)famous 'Rivers of Blood' speech (1968) – which sought to deny diversity in favour of a collective 'British' identity grounded in essentialised notions of white English Britishness. Thus, according to Gillespie, race relations policy, in which assimilation was integral, fostered the abandonment of immigrant cultural identities.

The concepts of black as 'threat' and black as 'problem' are also apparent, as Jim Pines (1989) observes, in crime dramas. Pines notes that black criminals are involved in naturalised 'black' crimes; using examples of street crime and prostitution, and black heroes are similarly 'ghettoised', in that they are portrayed as agents of law

within black culture, dealing specifically with 'black' issues. Central to Pines' argument is his observation that, despite the liberal agendas of programme makers, by segregating specific social problems as 'black problems' these representations trap crime dramas into a race relations format. Hence, in contrast to perceptions that drama engaged with 'race' issues in a more sophisticated manner, Pines illustrates how similar representations to those found in comedy entered drama:

> Although the presence of blacks in mainstream drama is often seen as an important break with the sitcom tradition, the conventions used to structure black imagery into the narratives have tended to revert to more popular (and often reactionary) racial and social stereotypes (p. 70).

Expanding on this issue Stephen Bourne (1989) focuses on the popular genre of British soap operas. The central focus of this analysis suggests that writers and producers of early soap operas omitted black and Asian characters, as their inclusion would disrupt the narrative framework of the storylines, by potentially revealing racist attitudes in established (white) characters. Furthermore, Bourne observes that when black and Asian characters entered the narrative schema, the characters remained marginalised to the plot structure, continued to be represented in stereotypical ways and were 'underused and undervalued' (p. 129).

The above examples indicate that stereotypical representations are evident in television, however these representations have also been proliferated throughout all forms of popular culture. For example, Clint Wilson and Felix Gutierrez (1995) have demonstrated how US advertising has been marked, first by exclusion of blacks and Asians and latterly by stereotypical representations. This analysis further identifies that when advertisers have targeted black consumers, 'racial pride' has been exploited to generate conspicuous consumption thus promoting essentialised notions of 'race' within the black community. Although Wilson and Gutierrez acknowledge that advertising in the 1990s had attempted to respond sensitively to racial representation by embracing a wider repertoire of black images, they maintain that these images continued to be framed within the 'white eye' (Hall, 1981).

Therefore representations of black people within popular culture remained firmly rooted within stereotypical roles, identified by Angela Barry (1992) as 'troublemaker', 'entertainer' and 'dependant'. Kobena Mercer (1989) states that this narrow repertoire of black representation results in the majority's belief that 'all black people are like that' (p. 3) whilst simultaneously denying diversity and difference within the black population. In addition to this, he stresses that a lack of alternative black imagery 'burdens each image with the role of being "representative"' (p. 4). This is of particular significance to ethnic minorities as media representations can impact negatively on the perception of ethnic minorities in social reality, as Simon Cottle (2000a) notes:

> It is in and through these representations, for example, that members of the media audience are variously incited to construct a sense of who 'we' are in relation to who 'we' are not, whether as 'us' and 'them', 'insider' and 'outsider', 'coloniser' and 'colonised', 'citizen' and 'foreigner', 'normal' and 'deviant', 'friend' and 'foe', 'the West' and 'the rest' (p. 2).

This point can be demonstrated by Elizabeth Poole's (2001) study of British Muslims and the British press. Poole's study aimed to explore how British Muslims constructed meanings from press reports on Islam. Her study revealed that the British Muslims took an oppositional stance to negative portrayals of Islam, seeing these as ideologically motivated, while more sympathetic portrayals were assimilated into their 'common sense' perspective. However, although British Muslims approached media texts with their own interpretative frameworks, the participants believed that negative media coverage of Islam results in negative attitudes towards them by non-Muslims. Therefore the effects of media representation is felt to promote negative, limited portrayals that deny diversity within ethnic minorities whilst promoting the belief in whiteness as the norm and a unitary identity. However whiteness is not a homogenous culture, but a discourse that has been constructed through which it exercises and naturalises its power (Dyer, 1988; Gabriel, 2000).

2.4 Multiculturalism

Growing dissatisfaction with the race relations problematic and demand for increased black representations during the late 1970s prompted shifts in media and institutional policy at a time when 'black' was being rearticulated as a political, rather than racial category. This political rearticulation of 'black' was instigated by the American Civil Rights movement, which pressed for black liberation from subjugation and oppression. Rather than viewing black communities as a homogenous whole, recognition of difference and diversity were central tenets of multiculturalism. Thus, multiculturalism abandoned the ideals of assimilation and integration in favour of celebrating difference. This philosophy was most notably reflected in Channel 4's (1982) mandate to provide programmes for minority audiences. Channel 4 aimed to promote diversified black representations facilitated by an increase in independent productions as well as greater presence of black people in professional roles.

Although multiculturalism aimed to move towards a more equitable process of representation in principle, new more complex racist images were produced that not only propagated existing stereotypes but created new ones (Salaria, 1987). Ross (1996; see also Jhally and Lewis, 1992) cites *The Cosby Show* (NBC, 1984-1992) as an example; ostensibly a positive portrayal of African Americans on US television, the programme presents the audience with a black family as 'ordinary', and yet it disavows racism and oppression. *The Cosby Show*, she claims, locates success in individualism and personal achievement, thus depoliticising the programme and allowing audiences to dismiss black inequalities as personal failure. As Ross states, 'Cosby functions to "resolve" America's racial failures by successfully recoding *black* in positive terms and therefore countering a history of negative stereotyping' (1996, p. 103, original emphasis; see Real, 1989). On the same theme, Mercer (1989) identifies a paradox within *The Cosby Show*; the programme provides 'positive' representations of black people, while purporting white, middle-class, American values. As Mercer states, 'There is nothing specifically "black" about the culture and lifestyle of the Huxtables, and in this way, the positive image is revealed to be no more than an imitation copy of normative ideals' (p. 6). Thus, although attempts were made to counteract negative stereotypes with positive ones, these 'positive' images were still

stereotypical and dependent upon assimilation into the white norm. However, Mercer acknowledges that black writers and producers who have gained access to the means of representation are perceived to be token 'representatives' of the black community as a whole, and therefore bear the 'burden of representation':

> If every black image, event or individual is expected to be 'representative', this can only simplify and homogenise the diversity of black experience and identities. In other words the burden of representation reinforces the reductive logic of the stereotype (p. 9).

This notion is also explored by Paul Gilroy (1983) who posits further problems with the depiction of 'positive blacks' within a multicultural framework. Using the example of Channel 4's all-black sitcom *No Problem!* (1983-1985), Gilroy states that the exclusion of politics within the narrative structure enabled the white audience to laugh *at* the black characters from a 'common sense' racist perspective. *No Problem!*, he claims, can be accused of this as the characters were portrayed as figures of 'blackness' without any reference to black social reality. Furthermore, Gilroy problematises the structure of multicultural programming, suggesting that specific programming for ethnic minority audiences is in itself an act of marginalisation that mirrors black people's lived experience. Thus, he maintains that multicultural programmes' focus on ethnic minorities' antagonisms and difference with white culture reinforces and cements the positioning of blacks as problematic 'Other'.

It should be noted that several commentators have stated that ethnic minority representation is motivated by economic imperatives rather than an intrinsic interest in black culture (Gandy, 1998; Valdivia, 2002). Cottle (2000b) maintains that multicultural programming is hindered, as its content has to conform to the agendas of a media industry subject to a 'Byzantine bureaucracy' (p. 103) and the constraints of a market economy. Furthermore he emphasises, in agreement with Gilroy (1983), that structural inequalities within society and the media industry neglect that minority status is not just a matter of numerical imbalance, but a structural imbalance in

political and economic power. Thus, multiculturalism, Cottle claims, fails to engage with these issues in favour of a celebration of difference.[8]

These suggestions are supported by a study conducted in the mid 1990s by Ross (2001) who questioned ethnic minority audiences about the portrayals of ethnic minorities on television and how they would change these representations. The participants noted a limited range of available images and the continued marginalisation of ethnic minorities. The study revealed that ethnic minority characters were perceived as unrealistic and, not only peripheral to narratives, but also never truly integrated into the community. Furthermore, the participants expressed that the home life of ethnic minority characters did not acknowledge cultural authenticity, and felt that multiculturalism continued to circulate stereotypical portrayals homogenising blackness, as Ross summarises, '"multicultural" has come to mean cultural homogeneity, a proliferation of uni-cultures into which all their disparate and diverse voices, interests, views, identifications and practices dissolve into a formless mass of stereotypical essences' (p. 12). Her participants rejected the 'black as problem/threat' discourses and stated that they did not require the replacement of negative stereotypes with positive stereotypes, but rather an acknowledgement of their diverse experiences within a realistic framework.

Therefore, the positive/negative binary framework can be seen to be difficult, as the above literature demonstrates, because it perpetuates stereotypical representation and fails to engage with systematic inequalities that are integral to the politics of representation. Hall (1992b) argues that identity and its representations cannot be reduced to a system of binary oppositions which continue to essentialise the black subject, and that identity/representations based on such must be rejected:

> The essentializing moment is weak because it naturalizes and de-historicizes difference, mistaking what is historical and cultural for what is natural, biological and genetic.

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[8] It should be noted however that in more recent years television programmes such as the Asian comedy series *Goodness Gracious Me* (BBC, 1998-2000) – which was originally targeted at ethnic minority audiences – and its spin-off talk show *The Kumars at No. 42* (BBC, 2001-2006) have attempted to subvert racist stereotypes through comedy (Gillespie, 2002); nevertheless these programmes arguably continue to neglect the structural and economic disadvantages ethnic minority groups confront, which would appear to support Gilroy (1983) and Cottle's (2000b) positions.

The moment the signifier 'black' is torn from its historical, cultural and political embedding and lodged in a biologically constituted racial category, we valorize, by inversion, the very ground of the racism we are trying to deconstruct (p. 472).

In his analysis Hall maintains that it is the diversity, not homogeneity, of black experience that should be the focus of enquiry. He claims that investigation into identity must be open to the numerous, and often contrary, factors instrumental in identity such as age, class and sexuality. Thus, in order to unpack the 'burden of representation' and open the area to more democratic representational frameworks a new, more nuanced schema of representation has been proposed.

2.5 New Ethnicities

Isaac Julien and Kobena Mercer (1988) claim that within media structures, limitation of diverse ethnic 'voices' constitutes a political problem. Firstly, an individual black writer or producer is perceived as a 'typified' representative of a specific culture. Secondly, minority 'voices' are contained within a 'majority discourse' that positions minorities ideologically via stereotyping. Hall (1989) suggests that when black people united under the political umbrella of 'black' to initially contest issues of representation, their two primary objectives were: 1. Black artists obtaining access to the rights of representation, and 2. Challenging prevailing representation and marginalisation through the creation of 'positive' black images. Hall states that the focus of this contestation was upon the 'relations of representation', whereas he proposes a move towards the 'politics of representation' which heralds the 'end of the essential black subject':

[B]lack is essentially a politically and culturally *constructed* category, which cannot be grounded in a set of fixed trans-cultural or transcendental racial categories and which therefore has no guarantees in nature. What brings this into play is the recognition of the immense diversity and differentiation of the historical and cultural experience of black subjects. This inevitably entails a weakening or fading of the notion that 'race' or some composite notion of race around the term 'black' will either guarantee the effectivity of any cultural practice or determine in any final sense its aesthetic value (p. 443, original emphasis).

Hall stresses that the end of the essential black subject will give rise to recognition of differences by acknowledging the multiple subject positions found within ethnic minorities.

These principles were also evident in black film-making practices of the 1980s. As Pines (1992) notes, black film-makers exploited opportunities for exploring black political and cultural issues in a manner which was sympathetic with Hall's recontextualisation of identity. According to Pines, these films not only challenged conventional modes of representation of minorities originating from the race relations and multicultural approaches, but also contested power relations that exist within mainstream cinema practice. Thus, subverting orthodox forms of film-making enabled a more sophisticated engagement with the complexities of ethnic minorities' experiences. An example of this practice is discussed in Mercer's (1988) analysis of film, in which he identifies two forms of black film-making: 1. Monologic film which follows the codes and conventions of mainstream cinema, differing only in content, for example *Blacks Britannica* (dir. David Koff, 1978) and *The People's Account* (dir. Milton Bryan, 1986), and 2. Dialogic film which challenges and subverts conventional cinematic codes in an attempt to eschew Eurocentric aesthetics, such as *Territories* (dir. Isaac Julien, 1984) and *Handsworth Songs* (dir. John Akomfrah, 1986). This latter mode he claims engages in critical dialogue with the film-making process itself, exposing conventional cinematic codes as a product of dominant white practices. By doing so Mercer proposes that the dialogic strategy politicises black film-making and constructs a counter-discourse to white hegemony by contesting the very notion of representation itself through acknowledging the various subject positions within black identity. For Mercer, this frees up positions from which the black film-maker can speak and creates an arena in which greater diversity can be articulated and the 'burden of representation' can be unpacked. However, it may be less appealing to mainstream audiences.

Hall argues that this radical rethinking of identity and representation, as exemplified through black film-making practices, will counter dominant discourses of nationalism and national identity (1987). He proposes that ethnicity is neither fixed nor permanent, and in so doing undermines monolithic and oppressive discourses grounded in categorisations of 'race'. However, Gilroy (1991) identifies a danger in

dismissing 'race' as a construct, arguing that the structures of power and subordination that affect social reality continue to be organised within a racial framework. Despite the apparent validity of Gilroy's position, Hall's proposal arguably remains credible as micro-level challenges – demonstrated for example by black film-making practices discussed above – contribute towards a destabilising of the macro-level ideas about 'race' and ethnicity.

2.6 Cultural Change

Globalisation and changes in technologies have seen a fragmentation of the nation state. It has been suggested that this has resulted in the re-emergence of discourses about 'purist' ethnicities and a new, more sophisticated form of racism. This racism 'seeks to present an (imaginary) definition of the nation as a unified *cultural* commodity which engages a national culture which is perpetually vulnerable to incursions from enemies within and without' (Ross, 1996, p. xii, original emphasis; see Gilroy, 1987). In an analysis of British newspapers Teun van Dijk (2000) demonstrates that this new racism is located in cultural, rather than biological, difference. Van Dijk suggests that this strategy functions through a process of 'positive self-presentation and negative other-presentation', i.e. their bad actions against our good ones (p. 38). Van Dijk concludes that this continuing pattern of representations instils negative perceptions and prejudices, thus perpetuating racism.

Although van Dijk's findings are pessimistic, various commentators have emphasised that cultural hybridity, produced by the same processes of globalisation and technological changes, is producing new syncretic cultures articulated through various media forms (Hebdige, 1987; Gillespie, 2000). For example, Roza Tsagarousianou's (2001) study on media usage by London's Asian and Greek-Cypriot communities found that although these communities expressed marginalisation and exclusion from mainstream culture, they demonstrated sophisticated patterns of consumption of media products which articulated their ethnic specifity as well as their inclusion into the 'mainstream'. As she states:

> [Minorities] are clearly demonstrating that they expect to be treated in a way that
> acknowledges and accepts the fact that they are living in a different place (physically

and socially) and are attempting to negotiate their inclusion to the national community of their country of origin in ways that assert their difference, at the same time affirming their common elements with fellow nationals living in their home countries or in other diasporas (p. 30).

The issue of media usage and consumption within diasporic cultures, principally Punjabi youths in Southall, is also explored by Gillespie (1995). Gillespie engages with the uses which a variety of popular cultural forms are put to. In particular, her discussion of the Australian soap opera *Neighbours* (1985-present) raises some pertinent points. Her study identifies that although *Neighbours* did not represent the social reality of this audience, the participants used the programme as a metaphorical representation of their own experience. The Punjabi audience did not *identify* with the characters and situations in *Neighbours per se*, but *associated* the programme's content with their social world. For example, the participants recognised problems encountered by characters within *Neighbours* as reflective of their own experiences and used 'soap talk' as a strategy for resolving these dilemmas as well as bonding friendships, discussing subjects that would be taboo in parental company such as sexual attraction with friends, negotiating family relationships and arguing with parents for greater personal freedoms. According to Gillespie, then, *Neighbours* enabled this audience to compare their own lives with white culture on television, and she claims that this raised the participants' awareness of cultural difference which would in itself stimulate a move towards cultural change. Therefore, Gillespie concludes that within diasporic cultures 'media are being used to create new, shared spaces in which syncretic cultural forms, such as "new ethnicities", can emerge' (p. 208).

2.7 Summary

A survey of the literature suggests that media representations of ethnic minorities have been politically motivated by white ideology and it has explored methods that have been proposed as strategies for undermining this cultural dominance. The struggle for control of representation is a crucial one, as representation does not merely reflect reality 'as it is', but forms that reality in the social environment by shaping perceptions and understandings in the audience. As such it is imperative that

research continues to interrogate representation with a critical eye, in order to develop new, radical methods of representation. However, whilst inequalities prevail in representation, it is important to examine how individuals make sense of, and utilise existing representations in the construction of their identities. Therefore the next chapter moves on to consider the various approaches that have been employed in previous research to understand audiences and their uses of, and relationship with, the media.