

Serving all ages

The views of the
audience and experts



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Summary

This report provides evidence of both audience and industry expert perceptions of age portrayal and representation in the media as a whole, but specifically across television, radio and the internet. It is based on an extensive qualitative research study involving 180 participants spanning a cross section of ages from 13 to 92, complemented by additional quantitative evidence.

This research sought to investigate 'age' as one aspect of portrayal and representation and explore whether and how it resonates with audiences. As society ages and the demographic balance between young and old shifts it is a timely moment to explore this issue.

Above all, audiences want broadcasters to provide creative and high quality content. To do this most effectively it helps to understand what drives audience views about the content they consume and the importance that they attach to authentic representation and portrayal within the mix.

Research methods

Our research was commissioned by the BBC on behalf of the Creative Diversity Network and aimed to inform the media industry about how the audience feel about age portrayal and representation. It was carried out during October and November 2011. Following a review of previous research the main activities included:

- Three day long deliberative workshops with a cross section of people aged 18 – 75 in Birmingham, Edinburgh and London.
- Nine focus groups – two with young people aged 13 to 19 in Liverpool, five with older people aged 70 and over in Cardiff and Barnet, and two with people aged 18 to 75 in Belfast.
- 40 follow-up telephone interviews with participants who took part in a workshop or focus group.
- 14 investigative interviews with broadcast experts and non broadcast experts.
- Questions measuring satisfaction with age portrayal across TV, radio and the internet were added to the ICM Omnibus survey, the BBC Pulse Daily Survey and the BBC Pulse 'Omnibus' Survey.

Key findings

The following key findings emerged from the research:

- **Audience participants generally agreed that one of the media's responsibilities is to try to accurately reflect society in all its diversity and age is an aspect of this.** Experts shared this view and additionally stressed the dual role for the media – both mirroring society and challenging attitudes and stereotypes by providing positive role models.
- **Although the issue of how the media deals with age was not of immediate concern to most of the people we talked to (17% in the survey said they were dissatisfied, and this was mild rather than strong dissatisfaction) – on greater reflection some real issues did emerge.** The biggest of these centred around the **portrayal of younger people and older people (to a lesser extent) and a lack of middle aged and older women on television.**

- **The level of concern in the survey masked the wider range of responses articulated in the discussions.** Audience views ranged from those who said age was not an issue at all to those who viewed it as a primary issue because of the importance they attached to its potential to inform, educate and shape attitudes.
- **Age representation and portrayal on television was more of an issue for the audience (rather than on radio or the internet).** This was due to a number of factors: the age of contributors on radio was not immediately obvious to listeners; the perception that the audience/user chooses the radio station, programme or website that reflects their needs and interests; and the internet is seen to be so large, diverse and self selected that it is hard to imagine it as a unified entity in terms of how it portrays any age group.
- **Younger people were most concerned about how they are portrayed** – in the quantitative survey over 40% said they were dissatisfied with this. Although **there is perceived to be plenty of coverage of young people on television much of the portrayal is viewed as unduly negative** as it is seen to emphasise their involvement in risky behaviours, to indicate their disrespectful nature, and often suggests they live unproductive and vacuous lives. This portrayal is also perceived to result in potentially negative consequences for young people and can contribute to distrust between generations. It is also felt to risk creating unrealistic expectations and unattainable goals for young people.
- **In contrast older people were more concerned about the amount of coverage of their age group rather than its portrayal** – older people were perceived by many audience participants as having less air time on television than other age groups. The actual portrayal of older people is viewed as being more balanced than for younger people – while it can sometimes be mocking in tone and occasionally insulting, it is felt to be more likely than for young people to emphasise their positive contribution to society. When there is negative portrayal of older people it is felt to revolve around incapacity – physically, socially and mentally – and a perceived stubbornness to move with the times as well as a tendency to moan about things. Television portrayal is felt to sometimes be out of step with current demographic trends as it can appear to be overly reliant on rather dated and inaccurate stereotypes of older people. The negative coverage of older people is felt potentially to result in them feeling marginalised and can contribute to their anxieties about their health. In contrast, the positive coverage of older people is described as portraying their wisdom, expertise and experience.
- **The coverage of middle aged people was much less of an issue.** Whilst it was sometimes viewed as being narrowly focused on people experiencing some kind of mid life crisis, it was acknowledged that this was acceptable when used for compelling dramatic or comedic effect.
- **The primary issue, however, at this stage of life is seen to be the perceived lack of middle and older aged women on television.** This was typically a key concern across all age groups – of both genders - but particularly for middle aged and older women themselves (almost 40% in the survey felt there were too few on television). It was also an issue raised by the expert participants.
- The process in which people made judgements about age portrayal and representation involved them considering a number of different and potentially competing factors. This juggling of factors resulted in them arriving at sometimes contradictory judgements about age portrayal and representation.
- Not surprisingly **the type or genre of programme is a primary factor differentiating views of age portrayal and representation.** If the content of the programme is serious and factual then the way *age is portrayed or depicted* is more important and there is felt to be a greater need for it to be balanced and accurate. Generally the need for programme

quality and 'creative licence' can override concerns of negative, narrow or inaccurate portrayal in drama, entertainment and comedy. *Age representation* – that is the amount of people of different ages - appears more important for dramas and soaps.

- Beyond programme type both *portrayal and representation* are more important when:
 - A programme has a capacity to make a bigger impact because it attracts a large audience
 - Age as an issue personally resonates with the viewer
 - The channel or broadcaster has a public service remit

Audience and expert guidance

- Audience participants had three main messages for broadcasters:
 - **High quality entertainment is key and ultimately this outweighs any concerns about age portrayal and representation.**
 - There is **a desire to strive for a more balanced, positive and accurate portrayal of all age groups – but specifically younger people, older people and in particular more visibility of middle and older aged women.** This is more of an issue for news and factual programmes.
 - There is a recognition that programme makers have to **manage the tension between accurate portrayal and the need to make entertaining content.**
- Expert participants made four broad recommendations:
 - To **recognise the importance of age without giving it an unduly prominent focus.**
 - The need to find **more imaginative and creative ways to challenge existing age stereotypes without being formulaic or setting quotas.**
 - The need to **more accurately reflect the age distribution in the population and improve the representation of older women.**
 - Finally, there is a need to **track and review progress on the portrayal of age** by, for example, ensuring the workforce (production staff, script writers, editors etc), content of programmes and talent used is more representative of the age distribution in the population.

Concluding remarks

In arriving at a single conclusion from this research there might be a temptation on the one hand to dismiss age as an issue at all (as it did not emerge as a primary concern), or, conversely, to overplay the significance of the feelings about negative portrayal of younger and older people and the relative invisibility of middle and older aged women. Neither of these responses would be the right one. This research showed that there is a need to view age portrayal and representation in the broader context of how people consume the media, and it is hard to disentangle age from the many other, often more prominent, ways that people identify and represent themselves.

Above all, it is ultimately the quality of the programme content and its capacity to inform and/or entertain that will sustain the engagement of audiences in the future. Ensuring accurate and authentic representation and portrayals of people of different ages can only help in this – in the end authenticity is a component of quality for the viewer.

1 Introduction

Above all, audiences want broadcasters to provide creative and high quality content that they want to consume. To help broadcasters deliver this it is important that they understand what drives audience views about the content they consume and the importance that they attach to authentic representation and portrayal within the mix. In this context, the BBC commissioned an independent social research company, NatCen Social Research, to investigate perceptions of age portrayal and representation in the media. The BBC commissioned the research on behalf of the Creative Diversity Network (CDN), a forum of UK media organisations with a shared commitment to improve diversity across the industry. The research aimed to inform the industry about how prominently, authentically and accurately audiences feel they are portrayed in relation to age in the media as a whole, but specifically across television, radio and the internet. It is based on an extensive qualitative research study involving 180 participants spanning a cross section of ages from 13 to 92, complemented by additional quantitative evidence.

Against the backdrop of demographic change across the UK it is an opportune moment to reflect on how the media portrays people of different ages. More people are living longer than ever before, fewer people are having children, family structures are changing and migration patterns are also shifting. It is projected that the number of UK residents aged 65 and over will be larger than the number of children by 2018.ⁱ Less than one in five of the white population are under 16 compared with over half of those from mixed ethnic groupsⁱⁱ. In 1950, a man aged 65 could expect on average to live to the age of 76. Today, he can expect to live to 87, and by 2050 to 91. Indeed, today there are already 10,000 people aged 100 or over. And by 2050 there will be 275,000. By 2030, people over 50 will comprise almost a third of the workforce and almost half the adult populationⁱⁱⁱ. *An ageing society is no longer on the horizon; it is here with us today*^{iv}. But equally, life for younger people is becoming tougher and more complex – particularly as the economic downturn has impacted upon them disproportionately; and as they find it harder than their parents' generation to get on the housing ladder and so on.

This introductory chapter maps this wider context for the research, provides an overview of the research approach that was taken, and gives some detail on the range of participants who took part.

1.1 Setting the context

We kick off our report by summarising some of the emerging themes from existing research around the subject of age. Even a seemingly simple task of categorising people by age group comes with its own complexities. Findings from the European Social Survey (2008)^v indicate that there are differences as to what is defined as 'younger' and what is 'older' depending on the age of a person. On average, respondents in the UK estimate that youth ends at 35 years old and that old age starts at 59. However, there are marked differences in perceptions between different age groups with 15-24 year olds feeling that youth ends at 28 years and old age starting at 55 whereas people aged 75 and over feel that youth ends at 44 and old age starts at 66^{vi}.

In terms of how people feel they are perceived in society because of their age, perceptions of discrimination and prejudice can affect people in both younger and older age groups. The European Social Survey (2008) reported that young people are more likely to feel discriminated against because of their age than older people, with over half (55%) of 18–29 year olds having experienced prejudice because of their age in the last year, compared with only a fifth (20%) of 60–69 year olds. The 2010 British Social Attitudes Survey (2010) also found that people in Britain are generally more positive about older people than they are about young people. When asked "how negative or positive" they feel towards people in different age groups people gave those in their 70s a higher mean score (7.40) than they gave to those in their 20s (6.18).

Research that has considered the role of the media in influencing these perceptions has tended to focus on the portrayal of young people in the press and news stories rather than in relation to more general broadcast media. These studies show that on balance people feel the media tends to portray a negative image of young people and that this coverage can have real consequences. For example, research commissioned by Women in Journalism in 2009 suggests that teenage boys are influenced by the perceived negative press with nearly a third saying that they are "always" or "often" wary of other teenage boys they don't know and that 85% of teenage boys believe newspapers are biased against them.^{vii} Furthermore, findings from a recent survey by Teesside University suggests that portrayal in the media has wider social consequences with nearly two-thirds of young people they spoke to believing that the media portrays young people negatively and, as a consequence, they are poorly perceived by adults in general^{viii}.

Existing evidence suggests that perceptions about the portrayal of older people is also felt to be sometimes negative. For example, a survey for the government equalities review found that 17% of people had the perception that media coverage of those aged 70+ was mostly negative^{ix}. Research for the television regulator in 2002 found that about half the older audience surveyed (aged 55+) did not think that older people are portrayed realistically in factual programmes and even more believed that the views of this age group are often ignored, and consequently they wanted to see more older people on factual programmes, both as presenters and contributors^x. This finding was endorsed by research to inform the BBC's Diversity Strategy (2010) which reported that many participants wanted to see more older people represented across the network^{xi}.

In addition to opinion surveys research has also been carried out to attempt to measure the amount of coverage of people of different ages that are shown on screen. For example, the *Older Faces Audit* commissioned by Anchor (Mar 2010) suggests that television presenters and other on-screen cast under-represent the 50-64 and 65+ age groups, compared with the general population^{xii}. Gender also appears to be key in any consideration of how different age groups are portrayed, particularly among older actors and presenters. Another snapshot content analysis, commissioned by Channel 4 on behalf of the CDN in 2009, suggests that men on screen are visibly older than women - a larger proportion of the male TV population fell into the older age groups than did their female counterparts with six out of ten men in the sample (61%) aged 40 plus years compared with four in ten women in the same sample (42%)^{xiii}. This pattern of fewer older women on television is reflected in opinion surveys: an ICM poll in 2009 commissioned by the charities Age Concern and Help the Aged (now Age UK), found that 71% of respondents were happy to see more older women on screen, while at the same time 80% agreed that in practice, television favoured younger presenters. The vast majority of respondents also said they believed there should be more older women reading the news, with only 9% disagreeing^{xiv}.

Other research has considered how many older women are cast more generally. A survey in the USA by the Screen Actors Guild found that women aged 40 and over landed only 11% of all the available film and TV roles. Although this figure is creeping up gradually from a level of around 9% in the early 1990s, male actors aged 40 and above still regularly account for more than a quarter of all the roles cast in America^{xv}. There is evidence of change over time, however, as a study conducted by the Radio Times in 2010 found that in 1950 the average age of leading female performers and presenters in prime time television was 32 years 7 months, as against 46 years 9 months for men. Steps appear to have been taken by broadcasters to improve the representation of women of different ages as in 2010 the average age for women pushed above 40 while men remained at 46^{xvi}.

In terms of how on screen representation compares across different genres, the CDN content analysis of a snapshot in time in 2009 indicated that continuing dramas showed almost equal numbers of males and females whereas representation of women in factual and news output, including contributors, was only 34% and 31% respectively, pulling down the overall level of representation of women on screen to 35%^{xvii}.

The issue of age portrayal and representation is evidently complex and it is not clear from earlier research whether it is key to connecting with audiences across broadcast media. Older audiences, who may be less visible on screen, continue to view more television and listen to more radio than

younger people^{xviii}. Similarly, younger people engage with a wider range of media channels and platforms than ever before^{xix}.

This study builds on this existing research by exploring perceptions of age portrayal from both an industry and an audience perspective, in order to assess how different age groups feel about the amount of air time given to older/younger characters, how authentic the portrayal is felt to be and what factors may contribute to judgements about portrayal and representation.

1.2 Research aims

Our research was designed to inform the Creative Diversity Network about how prominently, authentically and accurately audiences feel they are portrayed in relation to age in the media as a whole, but specifically in relation to television, radio and the internet.

The qualitative research had four specific objectives to address with audience participants:

- Explore perceptions about the importance of age representation (i.e. inclusion of different age groups) and portrayal (i.e. how people are depicted) in the media and the specific role the media has in relation to this issue
- Examine views about the way age and different age groups are represented and portrayed in the media and specifically consider how these compare across three different platforms – television, radio and the internet – and different types of programme.
- Understand how views vary according to different circumstances and explore the factors that underpin these views.
- Provide suggestions and advice for ensuring age representation and portrayal is covered in as authentic and creatively engaging way as possible; and identify key criteria for ensuring this

In order to complement and contextualise these audience views a secondary aim of the research was to explore the attitudes and perceptions of those in the media industry and relevant interest groups - towards the portrayal and representation of different age-groups, including some background on how choices are made around commissioning decisions.

1.3 Overview of our research approach

Our research design involved the following components:

- **A short scoping stage** which set the context for the research.
- **Three day long deliberative workshops** in Birmingham, Edinburgh and London involving 122 people aged between 18 and 75 years.
- **A series of focus groups** involving people in the oldest and youngest age bands. Two focus groups were held with young people in Liverpool aged 13 – 19 years. Five mini focus groups were held with older people aged 70 and over in Cardiff and London.
- **Two focus groups were held in Northern Ireland** with people aged 18 to 75 years.
- All participants attending a workshop or focus group were asked to keep a **media diary** prior to taking part in the research.

- We **filmed** a number of the participants after each workshop and focus group in Cardiff and Liverpool capturing their reflections on taking part in the research.
- About one to two weeks after the workshops and focus groups we **followed up a sub-sample of 40 participants on the phone**, to further investigate their reactions to age portrayal.
- We carried out **14 investigative interviews with** broadcast experts and non broadcast experts.
- We placed **survey questions on the ICM Omnibus Survey and BBC's Pulse Survey** to measure views about age portrayal across TV, radio and internet.

A total of 180 people took part in the qualitative component of the audience research ranging in age from 13 to 92 years. Participants were recruited to meet certain quotas prescribing their age, gender ethnicity, socio-economic group and media consumption. The 180 participants selected were a good cross section of the sample profile we set out to achieve.

Further details of the design and conduct of the research can be found in Appendix A. This also provides a detailed profile of the sample.

1.4 About this report

The remainder of this report is divided into five further chapters:

- **Chapter 2** reports on audience and expert views about the role of the media in portrayal, summarises the headline views about age portrayal and representation in the media and considers whether the portrayal and representation of age in the media matters to the audience.
- **Chapter 3** examines how the audience make judgements about age portrayal and the factors that are influential in coming to these judgements. It is primarily based on the accounts of the audience participants rather than the experts.
- **Chapters 4 and 5** expand on the summary views presented in chapter 2 and provide a more detailed diagnosis of views about the portrayal of younger and older people in the media.
- **In the final concluding chapter** we reflect on the key findings from the research and discuss the advice and suggestions made by participants for ensuring age is portrayed in the most authentic and creatively engaging way.

The report is primarily based on the audience perspectives from the qualitative and quantitative research. Where relevant we have also contextualised these findings with the perspective of a small sample of experts – both broadcast and non broadcast experts - who were included in the research.

The qualitative findings reported have been illustrated with the use of verbatim quotations, and examples. These are used to illuminate findings and are drawn from across the sample. The purposive nature of the qualitative sample design as well as the small sample size, however, means that the study cannot provide any statistical data relating to the prevalence of these views and the report deliberately avoids giving numerical findings relating to the qualitative evidence. Purposive sampling seeks to achieve range and diversity among sample members rather than to build a statistically representative sample. The questioning methods used are designed to explore issues in depth within individual contexts rather than to generate data that can be analysed numerically. What qualitative research does do is to provide in-depth insight into the range of experiences, views

and recommendations. Wider inference can be drawn on this basis rather than on the basis of prevalence.

It is important also to note the timing of the fieldwork and the context of recent events in which this study took place. Workshops and focus groups took place around three months after the August riots in England, and the subsequent coverage of these events. The riots were used by participants as an example of some of the ways in which young people are portrayed and could have impacted on the extent to which people felt negative portrayal was dominant.

ⁱ Social Trends 41 <http://www.ons.gov.uk/ons/rel/social-trends-rd/social-trends/social-trends-41/index.html>

ⁱⁱ National Statistics, Focus on Ethnicity and Identity, ONS March 2005

ⁱⁱⁱ DWP Ageing Society <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/>

^{iv} DWP Ageing Society <http://www.dwp.gov.uk/policy/ageing-society/>

^v EURAGE (2011) Ageism in Europe Findings From the European Social Survey, Age UK [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true)

[professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true)

^{vi} EURAGE (2011) Ageism in Europe Findings From the European Social Survey, Age UK [http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true)

[professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true](http://www.ageuk.org.uk/Documents/EN-GB/For-professionals/ageism_across_europe_report_interactive.pdf?dtrk=true)

^{vii} *Hoodie-Winked*, Women in Journalism, 2009

^{viii} O2 Youth Matters

www.tees.ac.uk/sections/research/news_story.cfm?story_id=3783&this_issue_title=August%202011&this_issue=219

^{ix} *Fairness and Freedom*, Equalities Review 2007

^x ITC 'The Numbers Game- Older People and the Media'

[www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/itc/uploads/The_Numbers_Game_Older_people_and_the_media.p](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/itc/uploads/The_Numbers_Game_Older_people_and_the_media.pdf)

[df](http://www.ofcom.org.uk/static/archive/itc/uploads/The_Numbers_Game_Older_people_and_the_media.pdf)

^{xi} BBC Diversity Strategy, www.bbc.co.uk/diversity/strategy.shtml

^{xii} www.anchor.org.uk/ATDocuments/OlderFacesAuditFINAL22March.pdf

^{xiii} Cumberbatch Research Group

http://www.creativediversitynetwork.org/pdfs/CDN_EndOfTermReport_2009-2010.pdf

^{xiv} www.guardian.co.uk/media/2009/aug/20/older-tv-presenters-arlene-phillips-strictly-come-dancing

^{xv} <http://www.guardian.co.uk/film/2009/dec/20/hollywood-sex-older-woman-weaver>

^{xvi} www.radiotimes.com/content/features/gender-age-gap-on-TV/

^{xvii} Cumberbatch Research Group

http://www.creativediversitynetwork.org/pdfs/CDN_EndOfTermReport_2009-2010.pdf

^{xviii} BARB 2010; RAJAR 12 months to Q1 2011

^{xix} Ofcom Communications Market Report 2011

2 Conceptions of age and the media

This chapter sets the context for the report by considering to what degree the portrayal and representation of age in the media matters to the public at large. As will be seen, participants found it difficult to reflect on the topic of age and the way it is portrayed and represented by the media. They typically equated the question with whether there is enough 'on television' for their age group as this was the way they intuitively associated with age and the media. The quantitative research showed that only 17% of the population declared themselves 'dissatisfied' with the way their age group is portrayed, and much of this dissatisfaction was mild. Participants' views ranged along a continuum from those who said age portrayal was not an issue to those who viewed it as a primary issue because of the importance they attached to its potential to impact on views and attitudes. We begin by describing participant and expert views about what they see as the role of the media in the portrayal of people of different age groups.

Key findings:

- Audience participants generally agreed that one of the media's responsibilities is to try to accurately reflect society in all its diversity, and age is an aspect of this.
- Most audience participants had not consciously considered age portrayal before taking part in the research. Also, they rarely mentioned age unprompted in the early discussions about media portrayal. In the Pulse survey only a minority said they were dissatisfied with the way their age group was portrayed on television. However, when people were prompted to consider the subject, issues did emerge.
- Once more tuned into the subject, views varied about whether age portrayal and representation mattered – they ranged from those who said it was not an issue to those who viewed it as a primary issue because of the importance they attached to its potential to inform, educate and shape attitudes.
- Age representation and portrayal is more likely to become an issue for the audience when depicting younger and older people on television in particular (rather than on radio or the internet). There is also a specific concern about the lack of middle and older aged women on television.
- Although participants remarked that in terms of the amount of coverage, TV is skewed to younger ages, this is also the age group where the nature of this coverage is perceived to be most negative and unbalanced.
- In contrast, there is perceived to be much less coverage of older people on television but where there is coverage it is viewed as more balanced. While some feel it can be mocking in tone and occasionally insulting it is also felt more likely than for young people to emphasise their positive contribution to society.
- Age was much less of an issue for those in the middle age groups. Whilst there were some concerns about being narrowly represented in quantity and quality the primary issue at this stage of life was seen to be the perceived invisibility of middle and older aged women

2.1 What is the role of the media in portrayal?

In order to understand how age fits within the broader context of portrayal we began by exploring views about the role of the media in portrayal with both audience and expert participants.

2.1.1 The audience views

Audience participants were generally agreed that although the media does have a responsibility to reflect society accurately in all its diversity this was not just specifically in relation to age. Their views applied to the portrayal of society in its totality and so age was viewed as an aspect of this and typically a relatively unimportant one when compared with ethnicity and gender, for example. Underpinning this view was the recognition that the media can have a powerful influence on opinions and at worst can manipulate and perpetuate stereotypes.

If you're getting told something enough, you're going to start believing it.

Female, 31-45, Edinburgh

It was therefore suggested that the media has a responsibility to sometimes challenge negative attitudes and stereotypes. In this context participants specifically highlighted the responsibility that the media has for protecting the wellbeing of the younger generation and providing examples of good role models from within that age group.

When specifically prompted to explain the nature of this responsibility to reflect society distinctions were drawn between the role of the media in providing entertainment and in informing people.

It has to be fair, it has to be balanced, but it also has to be entertaining.... it's good to have the reality with the media, with the - with the news and what have you, and the Panoramas and all the rest of it, to tell us what's going wrong with society, balance that with a little bit of light entertainment to say switch off, chill out, watch Downton or whatever.

Female, 46-59, Birmingham

2.1.2 The expert views

In contrast with the audience participants, the experts – both broadcast and non broadcast – were considerably more reflective about the role of the media. They emphasised that the need for the media to reflect a modern and diverse Britain in all its richness was more of a moral obligation to consider these issues. Equally it was acknowledged that a degree of self interest underpinned this obligation as there is a strong business case driving the desire to reach the widest audience.

Experts were, unsurprisingly, more articulate and aspirational about the role of the media so they talked not just about the media mirroring society but also about its role in raising the consciousness, challenging attitudes and stereotypes and providing positive role models.

Life is complex and so you know what you're trying to do as a broadcaster is trying to express the complexity of life in a compelling way that people want to watch but keeping objective, balanced and fair.

Broadcast Expert

You do need to have life reflected back and characters that you can relate to but, at the same time, we shouldn't think that that's all people want 'cos, you know, they do want to watch people who are very different to them as well

Broadcast Expert

I think television is both the mirror on the world; it's also a kind of reflection or so, a window of the world

Broadcast Expert

People do want aspirational stuff. And you know it would be very depressing if people could only see themselves, but that's the whole thing.

In carrying out this more proactive role it was suggested that the media could increase the acceptance of diversity issues particularly those concerned with ethnicity, disability and gender. Age did not appear to be the primary concern in relation to these other characteristics.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, however, the non broadcast experts with a specific age focus as part of their role were the most passionate advocates for media responsibility in this area. They emphasised the powerful role the media has in representing a diverse society and specifically stressed this in relation to age diversity.

[The media] can be a force for good or it can perpetuate prejudice, discrimination and negative stereotypes.

Non Broadcast Expert

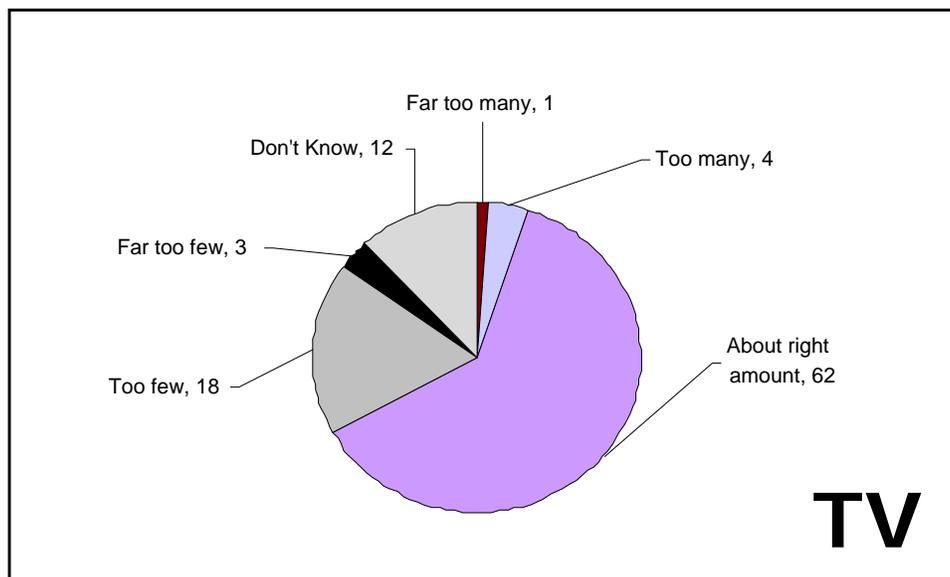
Experts also distinguished between the obligation for broadcasters with a public service remit and those with purely commercial interests to deliver these responsibilities. In this context the BBC was singled out as having the greatest responsibility to lead the way and represent all communities because of its financial accountability to all licence fee payers.

2.2 Initial views about age representation and portrayal

2.2.1 How many express concern? – the quantitative research

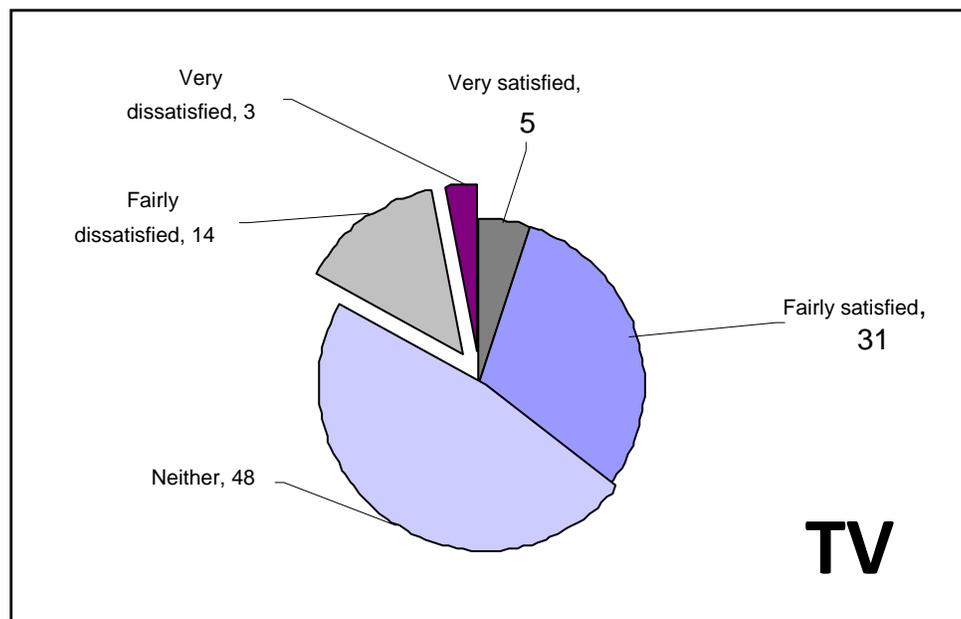
In the quantitative research we asked people how they felt about both the amount and the nature of the way their age group was portrayed on television, radio and the internet. For both amount and nature there were only a minority (around one in five) who had concerns. The charts below illustrate this for television – dissatisfaction was even lower for radio and the internet.

Figure 2.1 What are your feelings about the amount of people you see of your age group on television?



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th-13th November 2011.
Base size =1789

Figure 2.2 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way people of your age group are portrayed on television in this country?

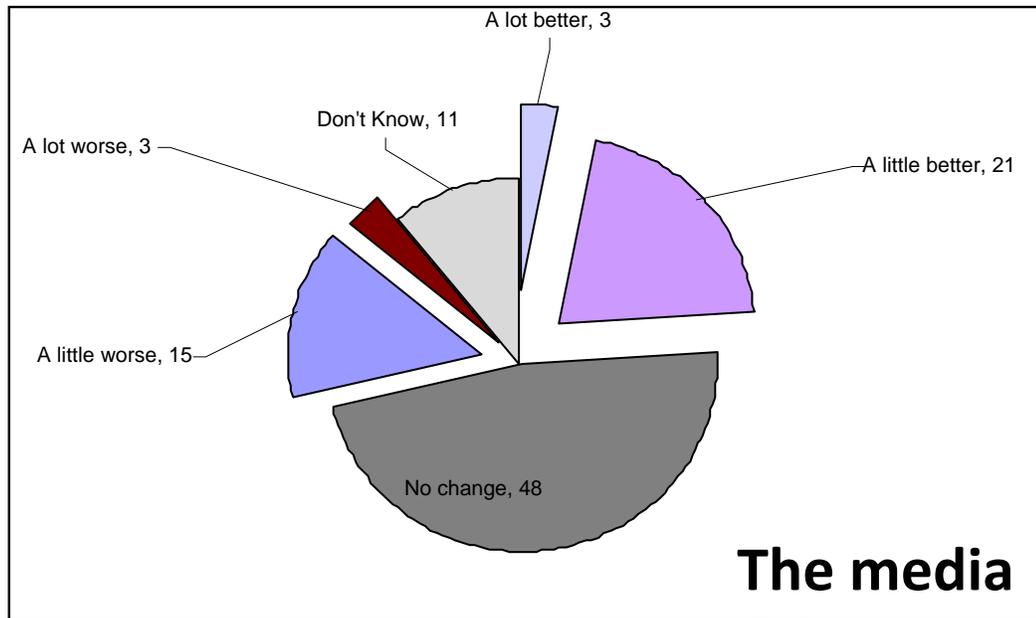


Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th-13th November 2011
Base size = 1789
Rounding up adds to more than 100

However, as we will see later this does vary for different age groups and there were greater concerns than this picture suggests.

We also asked the audience for their opinions as to whether they felt things were better or worse than they used to be in regards to how the media in general covers their age group. This also didn't suggest widespread concern – in fact more people felt things were better than felt they were worse:

Figure 2.3 Thinking now about how the media overall (that is television, radio and online) covers people of your age, do you think that they are better than they used to be, worse than they used to be, or do you not think there has been any change?



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th-13th November 2011
 Base size = 1789
 Rounding up adds to more than 100

2.2.2 Initial views – the qualitative research

In the deliberative workshops and focus groups we refrained from specifically mentioning age portrayal in the initial discussions with audiences as we were keen to assess whether age mattered to them and how much of a priority it was compared with other factors such as ethnicity, gender and disability. At this early stage of the discussion age was generally not a conscious issue for participants and they typically said that they had not thought about it before taking part in the research. So they rarely spontaneously mentioned anything to do with age during the initial discussion about the way people like them are portrayed by the media.

I must admit until today I hadn't really thought of it too much I've obviously not seen enough negative items for it to register with me. I tend to concentrate on the quality and content on the programmes rather than the age issue

Male, 41-59, Edinburgh, Video Blog

Those participants who did mention age at this initial stage described their concerns with issues to do with poor or unrealistic portrayal of their particular age group.

Even when participants were specifically prompted to consider the issue of age and its importance they found it difficult to conceptualise. This in part seemed to be because they did not appear to strongly self identify as being part of an age group – although the younger age groups appeared more likely to feel part of a recognisable age group. Audiences also made it very clear that they do not choose to engage with the media because of anything explicitly to do with age but for other reasons around the desirability and quality of what is on offer. As a consequence they equated the

question about how the media portrays their age group with whether there is enough 'on television' for their age group as this was the intuitive way it made sense for them to associate age with media.

2.2.3 Headline views on the issue of age and the media

Across audience workshops and focus groups the headline views about age and the media were surprisingly clear and consistent throughout the research irrespective of the geographical area and even the age group in most cases. These views are briefly summarised here as context for the remaining chapters. Inevitably there were more subtle and nuanced differences once these views were explored in more detail, which will be set out in later sections of the report.

Concern with television rather than radio and the internet

Participants were primarily concerned with television portrayal of age rather than the radio or the internet. Despite us stating our interest in all three media and specifically probing on the internet and the radio coverage their main reference point was television. As mentioned earlier this was also reflected in the quantitative data – more people had concerns about television portrayal and greater proportions said 'don't know' when asked about the amount on radio and the internet. Even where raised in the discussions it seemed that age portrayal on the radio was not really an issue. This was partly attributed to it being much harder to judge how old a person is on radio and so they were less likely to notice this. It was also because radio provides a much more targeted and segmented service and as a consequence people choose the station or programme that reflects their needs and interests. For this reason they were keen to suggest that age is almost irrelevant to radio because a person chooses the music and radio station they want to listen to and that is unlikely to be age bound. They did however acknowledge that in practice, some radio stations are more orientated to certain age groups and this impression was created by 'the chat' and 'banter' from the presenter and the type of issues they discuss (as well as the more obvious cues around style of music).

The internet was discussed even less than the radio (although we acknowledge that the discussion guide devoted less attention to the internet) and age did not appear to be an issue for audience participants. Participants explained that they typically access the internet for a specific reason which may well have no bearing on age portrayal. Indeed participants found it hard to conceptualise how age is portrayed on the internet because it covers such a vast amount of material. There was some discussion about the internet providing more honest, 'raw' coverage because there is no censorship but it was equally recognised that this lack of control over the content does not equate with it being more accurate. It was also suggested that the internet was geared towards young people as they find it easier to access than older people and so this colours the range of material available online (and in the quantitative data there was a significant minority of older people who felt they were underrepresented on the internet). Non broadcast experts suggested that with the next generation of older people and their relative use of technology that this is likely to change over time.

The remainder of the report primarily concentrates on television portrayal and representation of age and only draws comparisons with radio and the internet where there were issues to discuss.

Television coverage is felt to be skewed to younger people but this does not seem to concern people unduly

Across all ages there was general agreement that television coverage is skewed to younger people in terms of age representation and portrayal.

In the main people want to look at younger people on television, young, middle aged people on the television, and if they get to 50 that's that. I mean it's almost like saying no, no you should still be getting picked to play football for Scotland when you're 50 'cos you used to be a great player when you were 25.

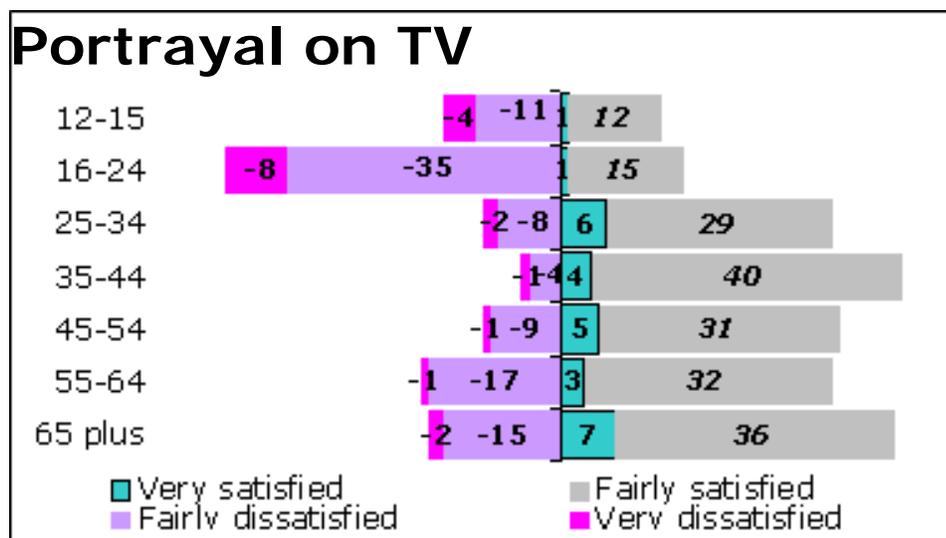
For this reason the amount of coverage or ‘air time’ devoted to young people was generally felt to be good with the exception of young teens aged 13 – 15 years who believed they were to some extent ignored by broadcasters as they did not feel that television catered for their age group. In the quantitative research there were also a significant number of 16-24 men who said they were under represented, but this was offset to some extent by other young men of the same age who felt they were over represented on television.

Conversely participants generally reflected that there are far fewer older people on television but this did not appear to really matter to them. As will be seen in Chapter 5 older people were sometimes adamant about not wanting to view people of their age on television. Related to this was the strong sense that these participants did not want to be pigeon-holed as being a particular age group or ‘old’ as they felt much younger than their years or apparent age suggested. They also criticised the way television appears to categorise people into age groups they do not recognise or wish to identify with – particularly for those in their 60s and older.

Negative portrayal of young people

The portrayal of younger people was often viewed as negative and unbalanced. Participants from all ages were concerned that it concentrated overly on the dysfunctional and more risky behaviours of young people and could as a result have an impact on the way the rest of society perceives young people. This finding was strongly echoed in the quantitative research – nearly 40% of young people said they were not satisfied with the way they are portrayed on television – much higher than the level for other age groups:

Figure 2.4 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way people of your age group are portrayed on television in this country?



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th -13th November 2011, sample size 1789
 Base size = 1789

These views are discussed in detail in Chapter 4.

The portrayal of older people is viewed as more balanced

The way young people are portrayed was contrasted to the more humorous, mocking and occasionally insulting way that older people are sometimes depicted. It was also acknowledged, however, that there are some very positive older role models and that these portray older people ‘quite well’. It appeared that older people were less sensitive and bothered about their portrayal than younger people were about their age group although as will be seen in Chapter 5 there were some specific concerns. This overall level of lower concern is reflected in the chart above.

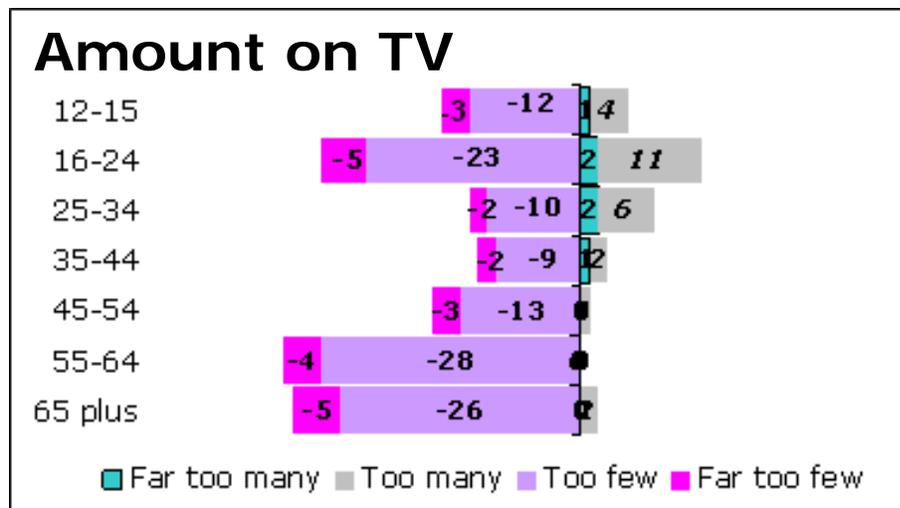
Middle aged people are felt to be narrowly represented on television

Of all the age groups there was much less to say about the portrayal and representation of middle aged people. Whilst there was recognition that this age group is much harder to depict because it covers such a broad spectrum of life events and circumstances there was some concern that where there was portrayal it appears to be rather narrowly focused on people experiencing some kind of mid life crisis whether it is problems with alcohol, their children, their jobs, or their relationships with their partners. There was however recognition that a more accurate portrayal of happy families and households, women at home with their children, people getting on with their careers or just being happily married might not result in the most entertaining content.

Concern about the lack of representation of women over 40 years on television

However, there was a particular and strong concern voiced about the lack of middle aged and older female representation on television. This view was expressed by both men and women of all ages but was much more ardently voiced by middle aged and older women who believed that a person develop a 'face for radio' at a certain point in their middle years. This greater concern about the amount of coverage for older women in particular was also reflected in the quantitative research – over a third of women over 55 said there were too few of them on television (and unlike younger people hardly anybody agreed there were too many).

Figure 2.5 What are your feelings about the amount of people you see of your age group on television?



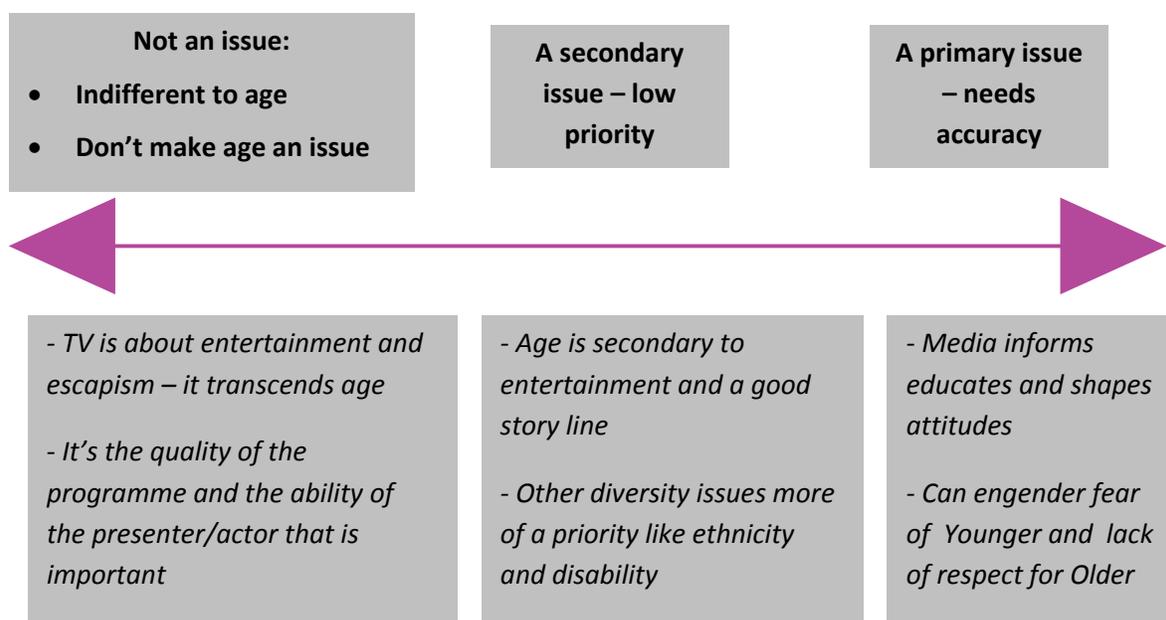
Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th-13th November 2011, sample size 1789
Base size = 1789

These issues will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5 where we focus on the portrayal of the middle to older years.

2.3 How much does age portrayal matter to the audience?

As was mentioned earlier the overall level of dissatisfaction people had with the amount and nature of age portrayal was fairly low, and they found it initially hard to articulate their views. In the discussions it became clear that in the level of importance attached to a topic varied across participants. As can be seen from the diagram below their views clustered around three points on a continuum ranging from those who said it is not an issue and never would be to those who viewed it as a primary issue because of the importance they attached to its potential to influence others. Being a qualitative sample it is not possible to draw definitive conclusions about the relative weight attached to these views but it did appear that they were more skewed to the less important (not an issue) end of the spectrum (and this is also implicitly suggested by the quantitative data). That said it was clear that the experience of taking part in the workshop and focus groups had been an ‘eye opener’ for some as it typically raised their awareness about how other age groups are portrayed and this resulted in further reflections about age portrayal more generally. As a consequence participants taking part in the follow up interviews said they were more inclined to think about and notice age portrayal as a consequence of the research.

Figure 2.6 How important is age representation and portrayal



2.3.1 Not an issue

At the ‘not an issue’ end of the spectrum views could be differentiated between those who were completely indifferent to the subject of age – they had never thought about it and could not see why they ought to think about it or engage with it - and those who did engage with it as a topic but actively said we should not make age an issue. Those who were indifferent to age simply explained that they never noticed age and believed that television transcends age. They maintained that age played no part in the decision about the programmes they choose to watch. Indeed they emphasised that they watched a wide range of programmes covering a cross section of ages including those that might be targeted at other age groups – both younger and older - than their own. Their only motivation for engaging with the media – and specifically television and to a

lesser extent radio – was for entertainment and escapism, and so they concluded that age is ‘utterly irrelevant’.

I have no thought on it [age] at all because it's of no importance.

Male, 45 – 59, Edinburgh, Video Blog

From my point of view I don't think age is that important I watch a programme if it's funny or entertaining or informative. I never really think about age, age doesn't really come into mind. I watch it because I want to see how well it's written or if I find it entertaining that's why I watch it age isn't very important to me.

Male, 18-30, Edinburgh, Video Blog

My personal preference is I don't really mind how [age is portrayed]...I use media as an escapism I might read a newspaper for facts but TV is an escapism for me, the radio is an escapism for me. I use media as entertainment rather than reference material for my way of life.

Male, 31- 44, Birmingham, Video Blog

I watch telly because I enjoy it. I don't watch it because I'm supposed to watch it because I am that age group. I find that really hard.

Female, 31 – 44, Birmingham

It was highlighted that the choice of programme people engage with for these purposes is governed by lifestyle and interests rather than age. It is interesting that age was not even considered as an implicit aspect of interests or lifestyle for these participants.

This whole question about the portrayal of, of me and my age I'm really, I'm just completely lost by it.....It's, it's, I mean you watch telly for entertainment or to, to watch you know factual programmes or sport and the age of the, the person or him needing to be like me, I don't [know] what to say.

Male 1, 31-45, London

Well, basically what I'm looking for is something, you know the whole, the whole picture of the show, whether the show fits, whether it seems realistic, if it's supposed to be a realistic show... if it is funny, if it's entertaining, I'm looking at those things. I'm not bothered as whether or not the age thing, they've got a guy a black guy that went to a university in the north of England, uh, grew up outside London with parents who are divorced, I'm not bothered about all that.

Male 2, 31-45, London

Underpinning the views of those who stressed that we should not make age an issue was the sense that it is the quality of the programme and the ability of the presenter/or actor that is important and that age never would be an issue. Amongst the oldest age groups there were participants who were not keen on the idea of age being more of a priority for television as they did not wish to identify or see more of their age group on television.

I'd rather err on thinking I'm younger rather than older, so I don't really want to be reminded of somebody on telly, looking a bit simple and a buffoon.

Female, 70-90, Cardiff

Finally, it was also explained that there is so much choice available for people to pick and choose from that there is likely to be something for every age group, so it is not really important for the media to try and reflect the full age spectrum across all its outlets.

2.3.2 Age as a secondary issue

In the middle of the spectrum there were participants who acknowledged that age could be an issue but viewed it as secondary to entertainment and a good storyline. For example, in comparison with the content of the programme and the need to be interesting and authoritative an 18 year old male said age was not that important because *'It's one of those things that you don't really notice'*. He did nevertheless acknowledge that people may subconsciously be influenced by age portrayal which could result in it being an issue.

Other audience participants holding this view explained that age was a secondary issue to other diversity issues. Where participants specifically compared age with other diversity issues they typically highlighted ethnicity, gender and disability as being more important because of the greater potential consequences of the negative portrayal of these issues.

I think it's [age] kind of down the pecking order, really from when I think of ethnic background, you know, and ethnic background, there's not really a lot for people of an ethnic background as there should be in terms of TV. I watch a lot of soaps and a lot of the ethnic groups are kind of stereotyped. A lot of the roles are the same; a lot of the issues are the same..... You're appealing to the people that are in Britain who are very much multicultural now, so I think there should be some more focus on... these different type of, you know, ethnic backgrounds rather than age. Age is...it's something that we all relate to.... but not everybody relates to everyone's culture, if you get what I mean.

Female, 31 – 45, Birmingham

Nationality was also specifically raised in this context in the workshop in Edinburgh. For these participants being Scottish or 'Scottishness' was singled out as being more important than the age of people on screen.

In these circumstances participants explained that they were more likely to relate to a character on the basis of their gender, ethnicity, nationality and their personality before they would specifically consider or even be aware of age. By way of explanation for this it was also suggested that people are more tuned into these other diversity issues than they are age and as a consequence are more likely to notice them. Another explanation given for this, in particular by the experts we spoke to, was that people may not self identify as a particular age:

People generally don't self identify in terms of age and there is something about much of the human condition which is people want to put off thinking about getting older.

Non Broadcast Expert

The broadcast experts we spoke to emphasised the importance of focusing on providing a range of quality content that will engage a range of different audiences and warned against making age the starting point of the creative process in order to broaden the representation of ages in the output. However, they also acknowledged that including a range of ages can facilitate that process by providing variety and interest.

We need to encourage the creative community, in our case, writers, to think widely and to make sure that we're offering as wide a pallet as possible in terms of the subject matter, the way we deal with things, the tone of things.

Broadcast Expert

What we're all looking for is volume which has to include the older audience but also, you know, some upmarket viewers and some 16 to 34s but I think there is a bit of a myth that in order to attract 16 to 34s, you have to offer them young characters. I think what [audiences] respond to is good characters.

Broadcast Expert

It's about creative casting so age I don't feel is an issue because the thing is to make sure that people of all ages are written where it's appropriate into the script.

Broadcast Expert

2.3.3 Age as a primary issue

The final group at the other end of the spectrum viewed age portrayal in the media as important primarily because in their view it has the capacity to inform educate and shape attitudes. Although this was not always explicitly stated this view related much more to television than other media. For this reason they emphasised that portrayal needs to be broadly accurate, as where exaggerated or stereotypical in nature people might not be able to distinguish between fiction and reality and it might then have the potential to engender erroneous beliefs and attitudes. Accurate portrayal it was said is critical because people set so much store by what they see on television and it helps to form opinions and as a result the old *'fuddy duddy or young tearaway depiction'* will be believed. For these people age was assessed as being just as important or sometimes even more important than other diversity issues simply because it affects everyone. The observation that broadcasters had made a concerted effort to bring in more older women as presenters was cited as a tacit recognition that the media accepts that it has this important role in shaping attitudes.

Specific examples were given by younger people who worried about the effect of the way they are portrayed on the perceptions that older people have about younger people. There were some older people who corroborated this view and indicated the media had contributed to their fears about young people. This was seen to work both ways – as there were older people who also suggested that inaccurate portrayal of their age group in the media might have the potential to result in a lack of respect for them amongst younger age groups.

The potential impact that age portrayal in the media could have on views was felt to be greater when participants were less likely to be in contact with other age groups.

Some of my family members that don't... socialise a lot, they, they live their life from the Metro.

Female, 31- 45, Birmingham

Younger people talked about the way in which negative portrayal could affect the decision making of others and result in longer term consequences for young people (e.g. affecting their future life prospects such as getting a job as well as well as arousing fear amongst older people).

It's important because we're gonna be the ones that are in charge in the future and I think that if we're portrayed badly then it's kind of suggesting that the country's gonna resort, that we're, we shouldn't be trusted.

Female, 16 – 19, Liverpool

Where like they're portrayed in a bad way then it makes other people think that we're gonna be bad, like not, it doesn't represent every single person or age.

Male, 16 – 19, Liverpool

Everyone watches some form of TV or some sort of media, and even though you don't know it, subconsciously it does affect your thought train, your, your decision-making and things like that, and so, you know, people who are future employers and that will be watching some sort of media and that, and so whether it's, you know, like you said, different ethnicities, disabilities, different ages, you know, it does affect the thought train, so if people are portrayed negatively in the media, say, with the news and that, with looting and robbing and that, when it comes to hiring someone, you know, it could affect [their decisions].

Male, 18-30, Birmingham

What differentiated the views within this 'primary issue' group was whether they thought age portrayal in the media is 'sometimes' or 'always' important. Those believing it is only sometimes important set certain parameters around their views and distinguished between the importance of age being portrayed accurately in factual programming rather than in other genres. Views were divided about specific types of exceptions to this such as whether it was important for soaps and drama to be accurately portrayed. The judgements underpinning these considerations will be addressed in more detail in the next chapter.

Audience participants at this end of the spectrum also felt age portrayal of their own age group mattered less in influencing them than it did for influencing other age groups. In the case of the latter, they explained that it is harder for people outside their age group to discern whether the portrayal is correct or not. Young people were singled out by audience participants as being the most impressionable audience group. For this reason the age portrayal of young people was felt to matter more than for other age groups as it was suggested young people might be less able to distinguish between fact and fiction in the media.

I think it more, mostly is, like, young teenagers and kids that are going to look at these things and think that they are the only people that are going to really believe that this is what really happens..... I think it is important how people are portrayed because, like I said before, for, for people who are watching their own age group they know it's, it's completely exaggerated.. But people watching other, for other, watching other people's age groups you don't, you can't realise they're exaggerated because it's not, that's not how you live so you don't, I'm not sure if that's coming across right.

Female, mixed age group, Edinburgh

Another explanation given was that age portrayal is maybe less important to older people because they are less self conscious and bothered about the way they are portrayed than younger people.

Well, I think you are desensitised that you, you, you become, you become less worried about being mocked or, or laughed at.

Male, mixed age group, Edinburgh

Non broadcast experts who were recruited because they have a specific interest in this area tended to share the views of participants at this 'primary issue' end of the spectrum. They emphasised the influence of the media in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of viewers and therefore the importance in ensuring broadcasters included a range of different experiences as well as including positive portrayals within younger and older age groups.

There is a moral and societal responsibility so that if there is a lot of inflammation, that the opposite viewpoints, and the representation of the silent, minority as well, is included.

Non Broadcast Expert

However, experts with a particular focus on older age groups warned against broadcasters highlighting people as 'older' as this created a sense of 'other', that somehow older people are a

separate entity rather than people who have a range of life experiences who just happen to be older.

That feeds into a sense of which older people are 'other'. And once groups become 'other', the degree to which individuals have a sense of responsibility, a sense of connection, a sense of emotional engagement can really reduce quite significantly, and it can have quite dangerous consequences.

Non Broadcast Expert

In the next chapter we examine the way in which people judged the importance of age portrayal and representation and the factors that were influential.

3 What underlies judgements about age portrayal?

In this chapter we illustrate how the audience made judgements about age portrayal and representation and the factors that were influential in coming to these judgements. This is based primarily on the accounts of the audience participants rather than experts although we have also included their views where appropriate. Typically television was the primary focus for participants throughout these discussions.

During the discussions we explored how audience judgements were made (and varied) in relation to two related aspects of age:

- Which age groups they feel are represented or included across the media in terms of the range of different age groups included and the amount of coverage of each age group (age representation)
- How different age groups are portrayed or depicted and views about how well or badly this is done (age portrayal).

As will be seen the primary factor that appeared to colour judgements about age portrayal and representation was the type of programme and particularly whether it is factual or non factual in nature. There were also some other less important factors that played a role in influencing judgements, some of which are also indirectly linked to the type of programme or genre.

Key findings

- The process in which judgements were made about age portrayal and representation involved the interaction of a number of different and potentially competing factors. Typically television was the primary focus for participants.
- Unsurprisingly the type of programme was the main factor influencing judgements about age portrayal and representation and principally whether the programme is factual or non factual in nature.
- Other factors that influenced judgements included the degree to which an individual identifies with age themselves, the specific context in which they view the programme, the capacity of a programme to make an impact, the brand image and remit of a particular channel and the nature of the media platform itself.
- The interaction of these different factors can result in quite different and sometimes contradictory judgements about age portrayal and representation.
- Age *portrayal appears* more important when watching factual programmes. Generally views about programme quality override concerns about negative narrow or inaccurate portrayal in drama, entertainment and comedy.
- Whereas age representation (the range and amount of different age groups included) appears more important for dramas and soaps.
- Age portrayal and representation is also more important when:
 - A programme has a capacity to make an impact primarily because it attracts a large audience
 - Age resonates with the viewer
 - The channel or broadcaster has a public service remit

3.1 Factors influencing judgements about age portrayal and representation

The process in which judgements were made about age portrayal and representation appeared to involve the interaction of a number of different and potentially competing factors. These factors revolved around the programme context and the circumstances in which a viewer engages with the medium. In this section we describe each of these factors and how they operate in isolation and then explain how they operate together to influence judgements in section 3.2.

3.1.1 The type of programme

Unsurprisingly, the type of programme and its content was the primary factor influencing judgements about age portrayal and representation. As will be seen this played out in different and sometimes contradictory ways.

A clear distinction was drawn between the importance of accurate and balanced age portrayal in factual and non factual programmes. It was seen as more important in the former. Views varied about which programmes should be included in the 'factual' group but this primarily consisted of news and current affairs programmes and some documentaries depending on their precise content and format. Sport and weather were seldom mentioned in this capacity. In the general entertainment or non factual group of programmes age portrayal was felt to be less important. For example, in the case of a drama, a soap or a sitcom participants expected and were more accepting of the use of caricatures and exaggerated storylines for comedic or dramatic effect where audiences are aware that this is not 'reality'. Indeed they said that it was more important for comedy to be funny and for drama and soaps to be of a high quality than for age groups to be accurately portrayed. However, a qualification was made about the need for accurate portrayal when soaps and dramas addressed important social issues

In contrast with the judgements about age *portrayal*, programme types and content were judged rather differently when considering the range and amount of different age groups shown (*age representation*). For factual programmes and specifically news it was said that the agenda should be driven and determined by what happened on the day rather than necessarily trying to represent different ages. Reluctance to a strict adherence to age representation also emerged in discussions about male presenters. For example, in the case of presenters of news and current affairs programmes like *Newsnight*, age representation was either not important or a secondary factor to the experience, expertise/knowledge and sometimes the personality of the reporter or news reader (e.g. Jeremy Paxman in the case of *Newsnight* or Krishnan Guru-Murthy in the case of *Channel 4 News*). These assessments also applied to specialist factual documentaries and arts and science programmes.

So, if whether they're young or old, I don't think it's relevant in this case as long as.....it's what you do, you know, it's your field.... I don't think it matters whether you're 20 or whether you're 60. If that's what you've been doing for five years or 50 years, then you've got, you've got an opinion on it and you're an expert in it.

Female, 46 -59, Edinburgh

Lighter factual/entertainment programmes such as antiques programmes, cookery programmes and quiz shows were judged in a similar manner and participants highlighted the importance of the qualities of the presenter at what they do rather than the age they were representing.

Conversely age representation was believed to be more important for drama and soaps although it was acknowledged that this often resulted naturally from the script.

The specific issue of age representation of middle and older aged women on different types of programmes, however, appeared to produce rather different and sometimes contradictory judgements to those outlined in the above sections. It is clear that these views were driven by concerns about the lack of middle and older aged women on television (see below). For this reason there were participants and specifically women advocating the importance of representing their age group as presenters on news and factual programmes in order to provide positive role models.

I find that I had different expectations of different types of programme. When it comes to a drama, I don't expect to be represented because I'm quite a boring person and it wouldn't be much of a drama. But when it comes to, um, things like, um, the way they tend to get rid of news presenters when they hit a certain age, that really annoys me because those are the areas that I would like to see people of my age represented in....: Because I think when people look at dramas, they're not really thinking, you know, they're not looking for role models, are they? But when you're looking for people who are, you know, giving us information about, you know, on the news, for example, and in documentaries.....and I think that's the area in which I want to see women of my age, you know, because...that shows that women of my age... I do have an opinion and do have intelligence, ... I'm not worried that I'm not well represented on Emmerdale because, you know I mean what sort of story would that be?

Female, 46 – 59, Birmingham

3.1.2 Whether age resonates for the viewer

The degree to which the viewer identified with a particular age group and attached any importance to this influenced the way they judged age portrayal and representation. At its most obvious there were clear distinctions between the way younger people and older people assessed the portrayal of their own and others age groups. There appeared to be a stronger sense of an age identity amongst the younger participants and as a consequence they were often more exercised about the way their age group was portrayed. In contrast older people seemed on balance to be more comfortable and at ease with the way they are portrayed in the media. As previously mentioned in Chapter 2 age categorisation was, however, a key issue for some of those in the older age groups who did not recognise or wish to identify with their own age band. This will be considered in more detail in Chapter 5.

As mentioned in the section about programme type there was also perceived to be a marked distinction between the representation and portrayal of men and women on television once they arrived at their middle years – men were described as being able to more easily grow old gracefully on television but women, it was said, are more likely to be 'airbrushed' out at a certain point. As a consequence participants were much more vocal about age representation of middle aged and older women than they were about older people as a whole. This was typically a key concern across all age groups – of both genders - but particularly for middle aged and older women. It was also an issue raised by the expert participants.

3.1.3 The capacity of a programme to make an impact

The capacity of a programme to make an impact was assessed in terms of the size of the audience it attracts, the frequency with which it is broadcast, and the context in which the audience are watching the programme. Participants highlighted that the larger the audience a particular programme has the greater the capacity to shape opinions and views and thereby make an impact. In this way they argued that accurate and balanced age portrayal and representation was considered important for news and mainstream current affairs programmes, dramas, soaps and other entertainment programmes which tend to attract a larger and broader audience. The importance of accurate age portrayal in these types of programmes was compared with the more

specialist factual programmes that attract a smaller audience and are therefore less likely to have an impact.

In addition to the size of the audience the time and context in which a viewer watches a programme was also perceived to have a bearing on its capacity to make an impact, albeit to a lesser extent. A specific issue was raised in relation to watching programmes as a family and that in this context it was possibly more important that age portrayal was accurate and that all ages were adequately represented as there was a greater capacity to make an impact. It was also explained that it would ensure that each family member would be able to more easily relate to the programme and this could also result in the programme making more impact.

A distinction was also made by the experts between a long running and continuing drama series or soap which has the potential to have much more impact over time compared with a 'one off' programme.

3.1.4 Expectations about the channel and programme

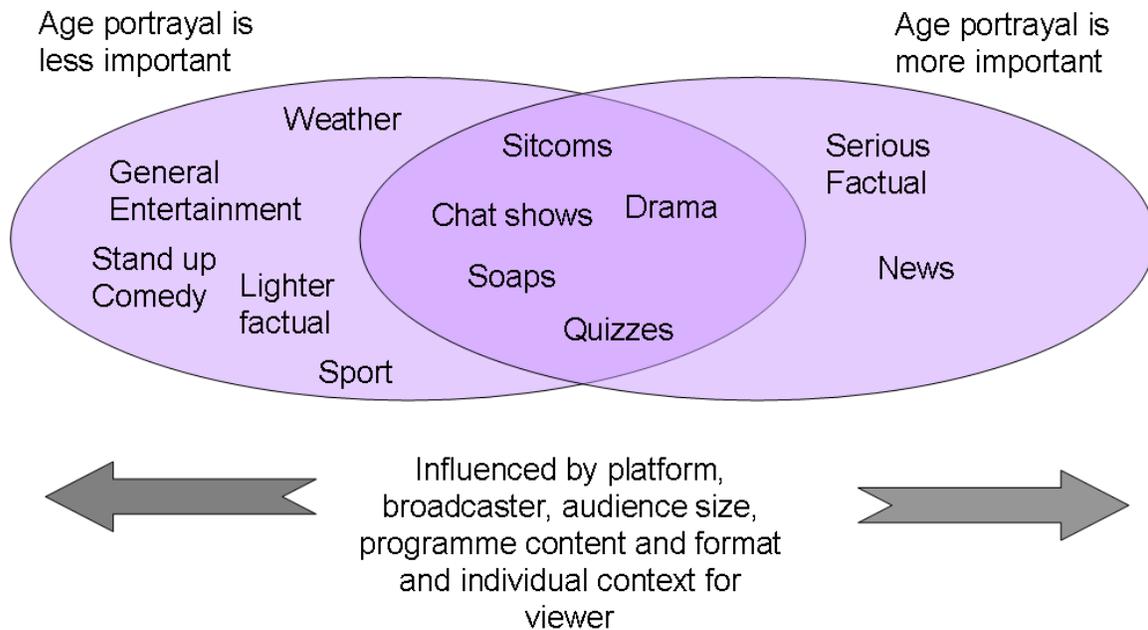
Finally, the image and remit of a particular channel and the nature of the media platform inevitably coloured views about the importance of age portrayal and representation - although there was much less discussion about these issues. The image of a channel was raised specifically in relation to whether it has a public service remit or a specific image which implies a level of obligation in relation to age portrayal and representation. For example Channel 4 and BBC Three were highlighted as being more orientated to younger people and ITV1 and BBC One for families which resulted in certain expectations about the way they reflect these different age groups. As discussed in Chapter 2 the BBC in general was singled out as having the greatest responsibility in terms of public service remit in relation to accurate portrayal and representation but this is not specifically about age - it applies to all aspects of portrayal more generally. Channels which operate for entirely commercial means were felt to be less obligated in relation to age portrayal and representation. In terms of platform age portrayal and representation was perceived to be much less of an issue on radio and almost a non issue in relation to the internet primarily because they are viewed as much more targeted media.

3.2 How do the factors operate together?

In understanding the process in which judgements were made about age portrayal and representation we attempted to unravel the way these factors combine and interact. The one clear message that emerges from this analysis is that it is almost always more important to the audience to have accurate and balanced portrayal for factual programmes than it is for other types of programme. Beyond this it is hard to detect clear patterns emerging from the interaction of these different factors as they sometimes produced rather contradictory judgements.

In order to try to make sense of this and provide an assessment of where age portrayal really matters we plotted where different programme types are located on a continuum from less important to more important (Figure 3.1 below illustrates this). As was illustrated in the previous section judgements about where a specific programme sits will also depend on the platform, broadcaster, audience size, specific programme content, individual views on age and the context in which the viewer is engaging. As a result the position of a particular programme is not fixed and can move around.

Figure 3.1 How do views about age portrayal vary for television?



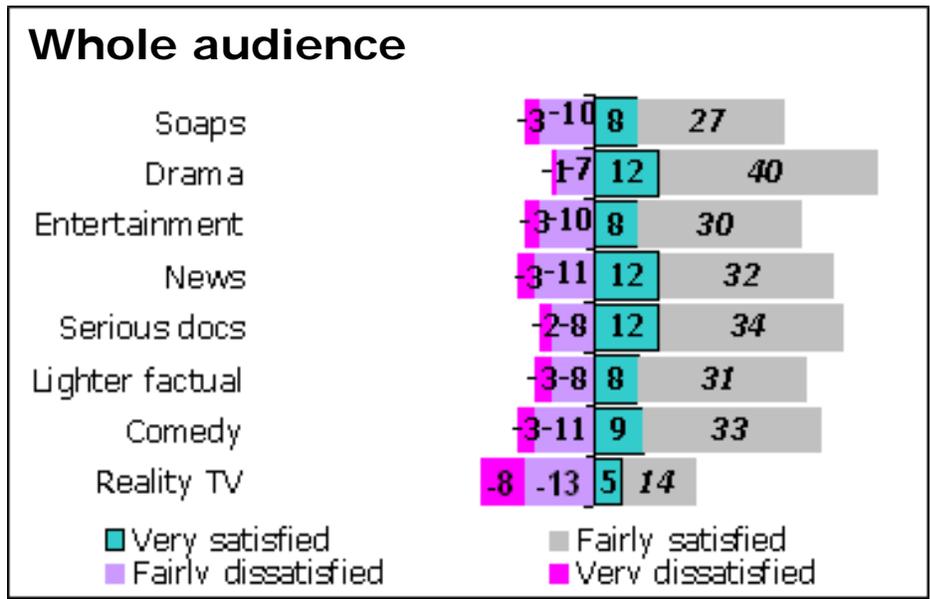
This particular configuration illustrates the following messages:

- If the content of the programme is serious and factual then age portrayal is more important (and for this reason drama, soaps and sitcoms may be positioned in the less important end of the spectrum)
- If the programme has a capacity to make an impact primarily because it attracts a large audience then age portrayal is more important (and for this reason individual drama, soaps and sitcoms may be positioned at the more important end of the spectrum).
- The experience, expertise, knowledge and personality of a presenter or reporter may be more important than ensuring accurate age representation for factual programmes. However, in the case of the news the actual coverage of the news item itself would need to ensure accurate representation.

3.3 Thoughts on programme genres – quantitative survey

We also asked people on the quantitative survey how well or badly they felt different genres of TV programmes cover people of their age group. At the overall level there was not a great deal of differentiation – for most genres there were many more saying satisfied than dissatisfied. The exception is reality TV where the balance is towards the negative. There is also least concern about drama.

Figure 3.1 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way people of your age group are portrayed in different programmes



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th -13th November 2011, sample size 1789
 Base size = 1789

However, there were some differences in genre satisfaction views for different age groups which will be covered in the following chapters.

4 The representation and portrayal of young people

Key findings

- Although there is perceived to be plenty of coverage of young people on television much of this portrayal is viewed as negative as it is seen to emphasise their involvement in risky behaviours, their disrespectful nature, and suggests they live unproductive and vacuous lives.
- There is concern that this type of portrayal of young people overemphasises the extremes of reality – the worst or the unattainable.
- There is concern amongst older groups that the negative stereotypes portrayed in the media of young people can be self-reinforcing. Inaccurate portrayal is also perceived to potentially result in negative consequences for young people and is felt to contribute to distrust between generations.
- There is acceptance that programme quality should come first and this can mean negative, narrow or inaccurate representation can be appropriate in the right context, such as comedy, entertainment programmes and some drama.
- In contrast, balanced and accurate portrayal appears more important for factual programmes, or those programmes that have the capacity to make an impact.

This chapter provides a more detailed picture of the views on portrayal of young people in the media. It draws largely on attitudes towards television, as this was the main platform of concern. It starts by describing the range of ways in which participants feel young people are portrayed. We then explore participants' views on two key elements of the portrayal of young people: accuracy vs. negativity and genre and platform. Finally, we consider the participants views about the wider consequences and impacts of the portrayal of young people.

4.1 Audience views about the portrayal of young people

As mentioned earlier participants of all ages singled out as a key issue the perceived negative portrayal of young people which it was felt typically outweighs the positive depiction. There was also a concern that portrayal, whether positive or negative tends to be skewed towards the extremes – either of bad behaviour or portraying lifestyles that are largely unattainable to most of the audience. As shown earlier findings from questions placed on the BBC's Pulse survey indicated that concerns about the portrayal of particular age groups are most keenly felt by young people with 43% of 16-24 year olds stating they are dissatisfied with how people in their age group are portrayed on television.

A broadly consistent set of views on the portrayal of young people was identified across all the age groups we spoke to. Participants easily identified different ways in which young people were portrayed and could point to specific examples of this portrayal without seeing any stimulus material. Young people more than other age groups also appeared to self-identify with being part of a recognised age group (as discussed in Chapter 3).

4.1.1 Negative portrayal of young people

The perceived negative portrayal of young people in the media, in television in particular, was felt to emphasise four distinct, but interrelated themes: their engagement in risky behaviours, having a disrespectful attitude, being unproductive, and being depicted as shallow and vacuous. These themes were felt to contribute to a sense that young people were a burden on society.

All age groups recognised that young people were portrayed as engaging in what can be termed as **risky behaviours**. This includes criminality at the more severe end through to drug-taking, drinking to excess and sleeping around. Younger participants pinpointed news coverage as focusing on criminality or suggesting that the lifestyle of young people was exclusively based on binge-drinking:

that's the only time when like you really hear anything...on the news, it's just like if there's a teenager on the news, it's just a teenager's stabbed some other teenager and binge drinking or something.

Male, 13 -15, Liverpool

Terms like 'looters' and 'hooligans' were also used to describe how young people were described in the news, perhaps reflecting the coverage of the summer riots, which was considered to be generally portraying young people in a negative light. Genres other than news were also identified as portraying young people in this way. In particular there was discussion of 'fly on the wall' documentaries or daytime talk shows which use confrontational approaches to resolve issues that participants felt are based entirely around one or more of these behaviours.

This theme was also identified in the portrayal of young people in soaps. For example it was suggested that once young people reach a certain age in a soap, their characters start to acquire risky and rather more anti-social habits and tend to be seen as 'no hopers':

In Emmerdale even the little one's started going off the rail ...they suddenly made her go evil even though she was good...she used to go to like a private school but she suddenly started drinking heavily.

Female, 16 -19, Liverpool

Linked to this negative portrayal of young people's behaviour, participants also described the portrayal of young people's attitudes towards others as **disrespectful**. Reality shows were identified as reflecting young people in this way:

I think a lot of the shows like the reality shows are normally about kids that have bad attitudes or need to be disciplined.

Female, mixed age group

More specifically, this kind of portrayal was described as showing young people '*not respecting their parents or their elders*' or others around them. Again, the riots coverage was discussed in this light, portraying young people as 'smashing windows' and destroying their community.

A third theme identified as part of the negative portrayal of young people was that they are **unproductive**. People from all age groups described young people being often portrayed as 'layabouts' and lazy, often relying on parents even into adulthood.

Whether they're office workers or students, they are depicted as doin' nothing all day... [young people] never labelled by their profession just as young and lazy.

Male, 18 – 45, Belfast

In the same way that the recent riots provided the context for discussing news coverage around risky behaviours, there was a sense amongst young people that another theme of news coverage was youth unemployment. The focus of this coverage was felt to be as much about young people 'not helping themselves' to find work as on the struggles that they face in the labour market. However, others disagreed, suggesting that news coverage did show this side of youth unemployment, but that they would often turn it off as 'it's too depressing'.

A final theme discussed in relation to the negative portrayal of young people was that they are often presented as being **vacuous and materialistic**. This ranged from being considered as interested only in partying, money and their image or as being stupid. In particular, programmes that focused almost entirely on young people going out and placing a huge emphasis on the way they looked or the clothes they wear were felt to show young people in a materialistic way:

They're just going gym, tan and wash their clothes basically but they have an acronym for it and then they hop into bed with each other...it's all they do [characters on programme].

Male, 31- 45, London

There was widespread agreement that certain talk shows depict young people in a negative light, by focusing on their risky behaviours highlighted above and also manipulating those who appear on these shows as well as making them look stupid:

All right, kids can be stupid, they go off, they get someone pregnant at a really young age but they portray them as idiots, complete and utter idiots...he sits and he calls them idiots.

Female, 46 – 59, London

In relation to this and the portrayal of young people as lazy, it was suggested by participants from across different age groups that TV often depicted young people's aspirations as unrealistic and based only on instant fame and success. Talent shows for example were seen as portraying a particular route to success that was not seen as attainable for most young people:

We think that everyone, for example, who wants to make it in life has got to be a singer and they go on X Factor and everything's perfect after that...they think all they've got to do is turn up and sing, and they're great because they're the best singer in the world and everything's going to fall into place, and I don't think it's like that.

Male, 46-59, Birmingham

Non broadcast experts also felt that there is too much focus by the media on the negative portrayal of young people. News programmes were particularly highlighted as both skewing the coverage of younger people to the negative stories and also using language which perpetuates a particular image of young people. An example given was when the exam results are published the focus tends to be on the fact that exams seem to be getting easier rather than celebrating the success and achievements of young people passing exams. The non broadcast experts also referred to drama programming aimed at young people which are perceived to glamorise the negative stereotypes.

They're very glamorised, very slick programmes, that are sort of debauched, there's a lot of drugs, there's a lot of sex scenes, that sort of thing...people that have gone through correctional facilities, the images that they portray are troubled - they're humorous, and very stylish, but they're portraying the sort of negative stereotypes.

Non Broadcast Expert

They also referenced fly on the wall documentaries or factual programming which, although can help to raise relevant issues for young people, were also criticised for focusing too much on the

'shock sellers' which highlighted the negative aspects of some young people such as teenage pregnancies or disrespectful young people.

4.1.2 Positive portrayal – contributing to society

As noted above, participants from all age groups felt that positive portrayal of young people was less prevalent than negative portrayal. However, it was recognised that positive portrayal did exist, and it was described in a range of ways that, in contrast to the previous section, are felt to emphasise the successes of young people and the contribution they were able to make to society. Participants also noted that these positive portrayals are particularly important as they challenged some of the stereotypes they felt are perpetuated by some of the more negative coverage identified above. Three key themes emerged in relation to positive portrayal: showcasing talents and achievements, showing young people working hard to achieve a goal, and examples of selflessness.

Participants felt that focusing on **talents and achievements** is a particularly positive way to portray young people. Programmes that showcased a specific talent, such as *The Young Musician of the Year* and coverage of young sports personalities, were given as examples. This kind of programme was identified by all age groups as a key element of positive portrayal. Among participants in the younger age group programmes made by young people for young people were also mentioned. Online channels such as Lemonade Money were described as good examples of young people catering for themselves (where they feel mainstream media may not):

Like we're putting it out there ourselves...there's a, a production company called Lemonade Money and they focus on like music and of like the youth like my generation like.

Male, 18 – 30, London

A second strand of positive portrayal raised by participants was the depiction of young people **working hard to achieve a personal goal**. This was described as young people showing endeavour and enterprise in a way that contrasted with negative portrayal of young people as lazy and unproductive. *Young Apprentice* and *Dragon's Den* were identified by all age groups as illustrating confident and professional young people that could be inspiring to others:

The Young Apprentice is [positive portrayal] because I'm always amazed at how confident all these people are at that age group...I didn't come from a generation of people that had that kind of confidence, women or men, so I find that quite inspiring.

Female, mixed age group, Edinburgh

Programmes that were sometimes cited as examples of negative portrayal were also highlighted as providing positive representations when they showed young people overcoming their challenges. *Educating Essex* and Gareth Malone's school choir programmes were both viewed as good vehicles for illustrating bad behaviour improving, as they are set within a real life context.

In this way participants endorsed the need for programme makers to portray aspiration, and inspire young people to achieve as long as it is felt to be attainable for most young people if they work for it. They contrasted this type of portrayal with what they saw as the rather unrealistic aspirations or instant success that is felt to be depicted on talent shows.

A final theme of positive portrayal was **selflessness**: that is programmes showing young people helping others or acting for the greater good rather than themselves. A very clear example of this was *Soldier's Story*:

M: I think the Soldier's Story is brilliant 'cause it gives you an insight of what's actually happening out there...a lot of young lads that go out there and put their lives at risk, so I think that one's brilliant.

F: ...they've got such responsibility...you've got other people's lives in your hands and if you don't do your job, you know, I thought they were absolutely fantastic.

Male and Female, 18 -30, London

Participants also noted *The Pride of Britain Awards* as portraying ordinary young people in a positive light showing young people who have done 'wonderful things' to help others.

Related to this, programmes that depicted young people behaving selflessly having overcome preconceptions about others were seen as positive. Two examples of this were *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* and *When Teenage Meets Old Age*, which showed young people learning to understand and work with people who were very different from them.

The expert participants also highlighted a number of these programmes which aim to show the more positive attributes and contributions of young people. Channel 4's *Battlefront* was singled-out as an opportunity for young people to campaign on issues that they care about. *Waterloo Road* was also cited by experts as a programme aimed at a family audience which shows disadvantaged children and young people turning their lives around, providing positive role models:

But that's got a balance of characterisation across it. It's got people who are marginalised, are disadvantaged, and it's showing them come good, it's showing them overcome their obstacles, and that's a really positive role model, and similarly it's got portrayal of people going off the rails and spiralling out of control, but at least it's a balanced view and it therefore may be a more honest representation.

Non Broadcast Expert

Regular soaps were also highlighted as providing opportunities for illustrating how younger people interact with older people in positive scenarios, reflecting reality:

Programmes which promote younger and older people together in dramas doing stuff, friendships, older people as real people with a depth and breadth of emotion, and a breadth and depth of experience, good and bad, just gives a bit more accuracy.

Non Broadcast Expert

The use of younger presenters in factual programmes such as Liz Bonnin in *Bang Goes the Theory* were also cited as ways broadcasters were providing positive role models for young people.

We also know that young people are very, can be very also affected by having role model, role models they associate with as well. I mean somebody like Liz Bonnin is an example of that and through Bang Goes the Theory, definitely she has functioned as a bit of a role model and I think gives people an inspirational somebody they can identify with ..being an age not a million miles from them.

Broadcast Expert

4.1.3 Age and other characteristics

The previous two sections have given a broad overview of views on the positive and negative portrayal of young people as if they were a homogenous group. In reality, of course, young people are a diverse set of individuals and differ from each other in terms of demographics and attitudes and behaviours. Gender appeared to be the other main way that young people were categorised

but differences in gender portrayal appeared to be much less of an issue than it was for the middle and older age groups (discussed in Chapter 5).

In terms of **gender**, there were examples cited of both young men and young women being portrayed in a negative way. Young women in entertainment and reality programmes were seen as often being portrayed as vacuous – *'they're all ditzy on those shows'*.

There was also concern that young women may be more likely to be objectified than young men and can be unfairly tarnished in specific circumstances such as the portrayal of teenage pregnancy when compared with young men.

F1 If a lad slept around it'd be all right but if the girl did and she got pregnant it's always the girl's really fault.

F2 Girls are blamed like more.

F1 ...I think it's really bad for making girls like objects, not people.

Females, 16 – 19, Liverpool

For young men, participants pointed towards stereotypes in relation to being a 'hoodie' and involved in criminal activity. There was also a concern that certain reality shows' showed young men as only interested in sex.

In relation to ethnicity or religion, participants were able to identify some distinct stereotypes that they felt portrayed particular types of young people in a negative way. One concern was the perceived tendency to depict young black males as criminals, and this was in part linked to the coverage of the riots. A second example was the stereotyping of young Muslims as terrorists. These stereotypes were identified by people from a range of age groups and not just those who were included in the descriptions.

4.1.4 Key issues in the portrayal of young people

Building on the broad overview of attitudes presented in the previous chapter we now consider participants more nuanced understanding of the portrayal of young people in the media focusing on:

- Whether the portrayal outlined above is accurate, and whether that matters
- How the genre and platform impact upon the accuracy with which young people are portrayed and whether it matters

4.1.5 Accuracy vs. negativity

In order to fully assess views about the portrayal of young people we need to also consider how accurate the portrayal is felt to be alongside the negative depiction. Not surprisingly views varied about the aspects of this portrayal that were accurate and these are discussed below.

Is negative portrayal accurate?

Participants from all age groups accept that some young people do from time to time engage in **risky behaviours**, yet there was variation about the actual extent to which they were perceived to do this. At one end of the spectrum there were older participants who suggested that significant numbers of young people were like this and that their behaviour had deteriorated over time. A contrasting view made by middle and older aged was that this depiction did not reflect the young people they knew and by implication was exaggerated and inaccurate:

I think it can be very negative to the young ones. And I don't see that in society. Maybe it's my daughter and her friends, I'm not saying they're squeaky clean or anything, 'cos they get up to teenage things, but I don't see all young ones as being bad. I really don't.

Female, 31-45, Edinburgh

A final view shared by participants from all age groups was that though this kind of portrayal may be accurate, it was given too much weight in media coverage. For this reason they suggested that the coverage should provide a more rounded portrayal. News reporting and programmes such as *Top Boy* were cited as examples of programmes that deal with difficult issues, and are an important element of the role of the media. However, young people did not always want to watch this type of portrayal as they found it depressing – particularly those participants who are looking to be entertained. In these circumstances participants resorted to other sources for information and factual reporting.

Risky behaviours of some kind were seen as almost a 'rite of passage' for all young people, but being **disrespectful, lazy or vacuous** was only felt to apply to a minority of young people despite being felt to be consistent themes in how they are portrayed in the media. In particular, young people and parents with older children were keen to stress the challenges of finding work in the current economic climate. While the news and other factual programmes portrayed this reality, participants felt the emphasis was on young people not helping themselves rather than depicting the reality of the daily challenges in the labour market.

M: Yeah, 'cos one of my portrayals that I put was on the news, they always state statistics of unemployment for youngsters...And then you hear people give an interview and they'll say 'oh people this age they're lazy, they can't be bothered to turn up for these'...

F:...it's not the case at all.

Male and Female, 18 – 30, Birmingham

There's a programme on BBC Three called Up for Hire and that was to do with the young generation being unemployed. And I just watched about 15 minutes of it and had to switch off, because it was just wholly condescending...they had celebrity commentators and they had no realisation about reality for people, say fresh out of university, and they don't understand the situation with regards to that.

Male, 18 – 30, London

Underpinning views on accuracy was a sense across all age groups that portrayal appears to operate only at the extremes: either the worst kinds of behaviour or the unattainable. So whether this is accurate or not, it was not deemed to reflect the reality of most young people's lives.

As a young adult, it's always kind of portrayed...like we're always drinking, don't do anything with our lives...like on Hollyoaks, they're always drinking, you'd never see them, like - be boring to watch, but you'd never see them doing their dissertations.

Female, 18 – 30, Birmingham

Now I don't watch programmes like this [Tamara Ecclestone] because I can't stand them, because it doesn't, for me, portray, it doesn't, it's not reality. It's reality for them but for us who've gotta work every day, some people do two jobs, some people don't have a job, and for normal people that's not how our life is.

Female, 18 – 30, London

Where programmes were identified as aiming to depict this ‘everyday’ reality, there were varying views on how accurately this was done. For example programmes like *Shameless* were either seen as providing a good balance of characters doing everyday things or as showing only the worst side of society in order to be entertaining; *Hollyoaks* was also described as either providing a good balance or criticised because all the characters are ‘thin and beautiful’.

How important is accuracy?

Whilst there is widespread concern about the accuracy of portrayal of young people there is also recognition that there may be a trade off between accuracy and entertainment. Indeed young people themselves acknowledged that they watched some of the examples cited as negative portrayal because it was entertaining. They also acknowledged that they would not necessarily want to see more authentic coverage of people’s everyday lives as this could be boring to watch on television.

If the media was honest all the time, and realistic in the way it portrayed everyone, no one would watch TV, or it would be so boring because there would be nothing to escape to.

Male, 18 – 30, Edinburgh

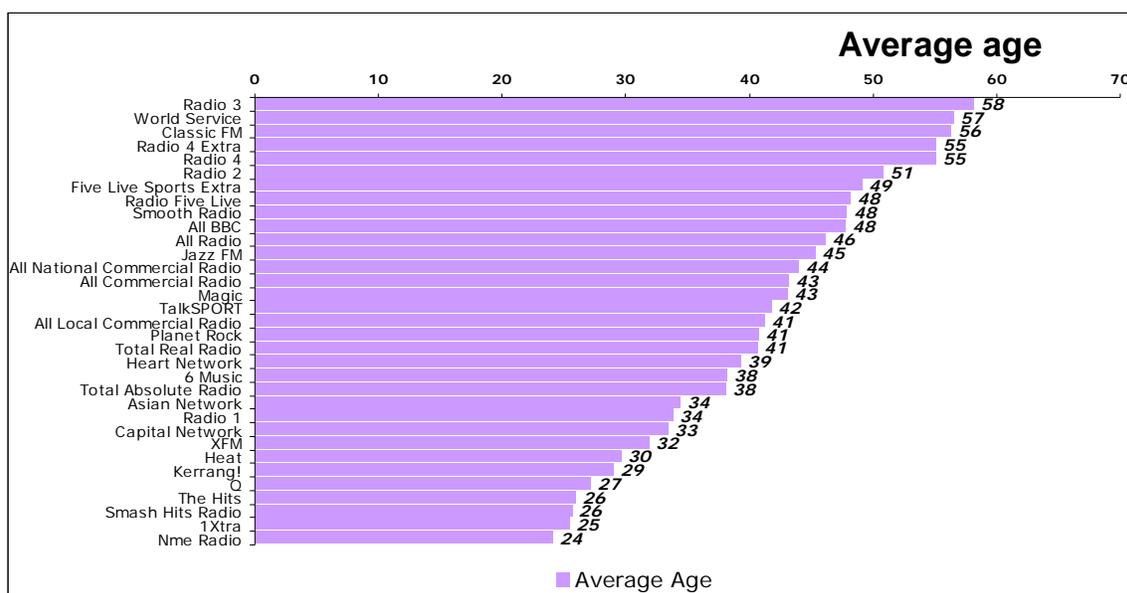
Despite this acknowledgement of their conflicting views, there was a general feeling that the media should aim to provide a more rounded portrayal of young people. It was felt that good quality programmes could emerge out of lots of different subjects and did not only have to focus on a narrow set of behaviours. The issue of balance was discussed in two ways: firstly, in relation to ensuring individual programmes are balanced out by some more positive coverage elsewhere; alternatively, that not all individual programmes require balance assuming that content across channels and platforms is balanced. These themes are explored further in the next section.

4.1.6 Platforms, channels and genre

Chapter 3 set out participants’ views on the accuracy and importance of age portrayal on different platforms, channels and genres. This section describes how that specifically applies to the portrayal of young people. Key issues identified by participants were in relation to specific channels (notably BBC Three) and the importance of the context and balance of programmes from different genres. There was limited discussion of the portrayal of young people in terms of platforms other than TV. For radio, views reflected the attitudes discussed in chapter two: as age is less obvious on radio and that stations are more targeted, the accurate portrayal of age was less of an issue. For online media, age was not considered a major issue, although it was identified as offering an opportunity for young people to create their own content that accurately reflects their age group.

Portrayal of young people and channels

Figure 4.1 Average age of UK television channels



Source: TV data based on weeks 1-46 2011, BARB

Although the chart above identifies that there are a collection of **channels** that appeal more to young people, BBC Three was the channel mainly discussed in relation to the portrayal of young people. While there were conflicting views on some of the content of the channel, there was widespread agreement amongst young people that the channel represented a fairly balanced view of their age group. In particular, the comedy outputs from BBC Three were felt to be good at portraying everyday life; this included negative portrayal, but did not focus on it exclusively. Also, a series of programmes showcasing talent and achievement were also described in positive terms, but there was a feeling this could be advertised more widely:

BBC Three ran programmes about 'young baker of the year' or 'young plumber of the year' programmes which represented young people in a positive light but they're not advertised enough.

Male, 47, Follow-up Interview

More diverse views were reported in relation to some of the other content of the channel, in particular some of the more factually based programming. Although young people noted that this was an attempt to portray reality, there was a feeling that these programmes could sometimes be guilty of only portraying the extremes of reality as described in the previous section. However, other examples of these kinds of programmes, notably *Soldier's Story* or *Blood, Sweat and T-Shirts* and *Jamie's Dream School* were seen as a good portrayal of young people overcoming barriers or challenging prejudices.

Genres

Two issues were central to how important the portrayal of younger people is across different genres of programme. Where age portrayal was felt to be a less important issue in relation to a programme, this was usually a result of the context of the programme, for example when it is clear to the viewer that the content is primarily entertainment or comedy and is not an attempt to represent young people accurately. For other types of programme, such as large audience dramas, news and factual programmes, accurate age portrayal is seen as more important and having more of an obligation to

have balanced coverage. These points can be best illustrated with reference to some specific programme types below.

As discussed in Chapter 3, there was a general acceptance that **comedy** programmes do have some artistic licence in how accurately they portray people. With respect to the portrayal of young people, participants described different approaches of sitcoms based around the lives of teenagers and young people. While they all deal with risky behaviours of young people, some are seen as achieving a more realistic and 'gritty' depiction, with a more balanced set of characters. Whereas others are seen to emphasise a single stereotype of young people as lazy and unproductive.

For **entertainment** programmes, participants felt that being clear about the context of the content was important. Audiences are prepared to accept content that is 'a bit far fetched' if it is made clear that the programme is for entertainment and not attempting a factual and balanced representation of young people's lives. A concern was raised about the blurring of lines in the recent phenomena of constructed reality programmes, where it is not always made clear how real the content and the setting are. For young people, this was not seen as a problem as they realise that this is not accurate and may not represent them, but that it is entertainment. However there was concern whether other age groups would necessarily understand this context.

As this chapter has explained, there is particular concern over the negative portrayal of young people in **factual programming**, notably news and documentaries, where it is seen as more important to be accurate. Participants acknowledged that showing the real world will inevitably include some negative portrayal, but that this will need to be balanced with examples of some more positive and accurate portrayal as well. Discussion of the coverage of the riots provides an illustration of this. There were two views expressed on the riots coverage. The first was critical of the unbalanced way in which young people's involvement was portrayed:

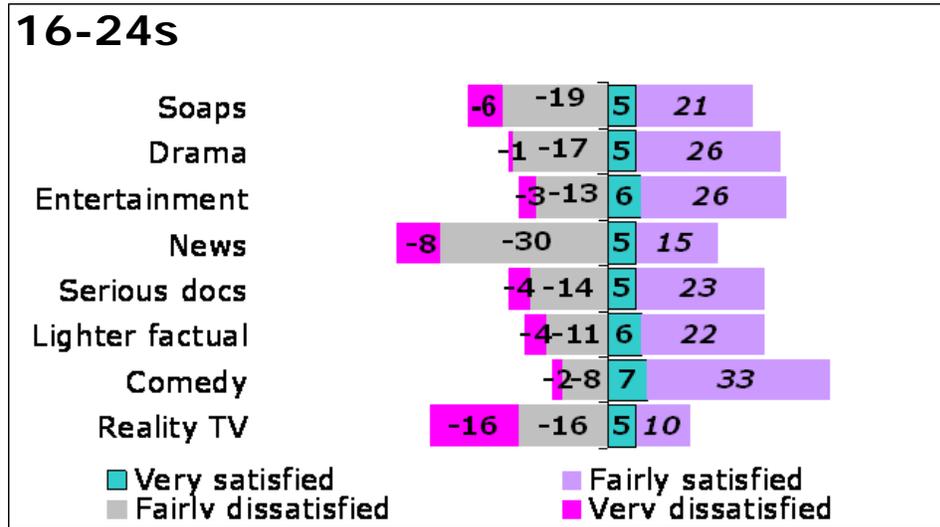
We were talking this morning about like the riots and that down in London, and basically everything they were saying was the bad part of it, like the windows, the fires, everything. What you weren't getting to see was when all the young ones were coming out and cleaning up the streets, we were just wee snippets of that.*

Female, mixed age group, Edinburgh

A second view, which highlighted positive, balanced coverage, was reported in the Birmingham group where participants identified local coverage as focusing not just on young people who rioted but also those who did not and those who were involved in the clean-up effort.

Findings from the BBC's Pulse survey illustrate still further the levels of dissatisfaction expressed by young people in terms of the portrayal of their age group within different genres. The results show that 38% of 16-24 year olds are not satisfied with portrayal in news programmes followed by reality TV programmes – although much of this dissatisfaction is mild rather than strong.

Figure 4.2 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way people of your age group (16 – 24 year olds) are portrayed in different genres?



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th -13th November 2011, sample size 1789
Base size = 1789

4.2 Views on the impact of the portrayal of young people

Chapter 2 outlined participant’s views on the responsibility the media have to accurately represent the diversity of modern society. Underpinning this was a belief that the media does not only reflect society but plays some role in shaping it. This study is not equipped to establish the nature or significance of that role. What follows in this section is not in any way a measure of impact but an analysis of participants’ perceptions of the ways in which media portrayal of young people could impact on wider social processes, attitudes and behaviours. Impact was discussed in two ways: impact on young people themselves; and the impact on the way young people are perceived by others.

4.2.1 The impact on young people themselves

In relation to the impact on young people there was concern that negative stereotypes of young people could become self-fulfilling by, for example, encouraging more risky behaviour or generating expectations amongst young people that were unrealistic.

As set out earlier, participants from all age groups identified negative **stereotypes** that they felt often characterised the portrayal of young people in the media. However, participants reported contrasting views on the actual impact they felt these portrayals had on young people themselves. There was some indication from older people that these negative stereotypes portraying young people as disrespectful, engaging in risky behaviours or being out only for themselves could become self-reinforcing. This appears to be based on a perception that young people are more impressionable and vulnerable to being influenced by the media:

Do we need stropky youngsters..acting the part of stropky youngsters? Youngsters are impressionable, they see them performing on telly, what are they going to do when they get on the street? Perform...They [teenagers] perform exactly how they are on television. Now you could argue television is only emulating them but the reality is, they will copy whatever they see on telly.

Male, 72, Follow-up Interview

Perhaps unsurprisingly, young people did not feel that they were directly influenced by these portrayals. Furthermore, the type of programmes referred to as perpetuating these stereotypes were seen by young people as entertainment and not reflecting reality.

The portrayal of young people was also identified as having the potential to influence **what young people feel is expected of them**, often in a way that is seen as either unrealistic or immoral. This was seen as particularly important given the relevance of aspirations for young people deciding what path to take with their lives. Participants described the way in which programmes that showed young people going out all the time rather than working can put pressure on them to behave in a particular way. The characters in these programmes were also described as being unrealistically thin, beautiful, glamorous and wealthy. There was a feeling across age groups that this can put pressure on young people to try to emulate these images and affect their self-esteem if they are unable to live up to them. In addition to creating unrealistic expectations, there was also concern about portrayal that was felt to be immoral for encouraging young people to think that there is only one way to be a success that involved somehow becoming famous.

It's almost as if for young girls, for example, that if you are thin, you can marry a footballer and make squillions of pounds or whatever, being a model and things like that. Now that, to me, is - is wrong...making yourself ill to become rich or to become famous or to become a model, for example. So, television and media in general has got a general responsibility for the wellbeing of our future, the young generation, and setting good examples.

Female, 46 -59, Birmingham

A programme that illustrated this for one group of young people was *Signed by Katie Price*:

I just felt that she [Jordan] was taking advantage of the young people, because basically she's looking for the next Jordan, and in one of the episodes she was like saying to them they had to wear a skimpy outfit, and the girl wasn't comfortable with this. So I just don't think that was good, like for young people seeing that and maybe looking up to that thinking they want to be like that.

Female, 18 – 30 London

4.2.2 The impact on how young people are perceived by others

In addition to the impact on younger people's own attitudes and behaviour, there was also some concern that portraying young people in a negative or narrow way could influence how young people are perceived by other age groups. This was described as potentially having an impact on inter-generational relations, at best increasing mistrust between younger and older people and at worst generating fear of young people. For example, this was described as apprehension towards groups of 'hooded youths' or affecting perceptions of young people's suitability for employment.

M: But look at the hoodie situation...People are nervous now because people wear tops with hoods. So, older people, like say someone like my age... you walk out in the street, and you're walking and you maybe five or six guys, or five or six, a mix of people coming towards you with hoodies on, and straightaway you're thinking, 'Oh...'

F: you're holding onto your bag.

Male and Female, 46 -59, Edinburgh

It was conceded that even accurate negative portrayal can still have this effect:

I was just gonna say with programmes like that they may provide a negative stereotype for the younger generation, but actually for the older people watching them it can be quite detrimental as well to their kind of, their views upon society. I think my nan just watched Top Boy and I've got family in Bethnal Green and she's, she vocalised how she was more apprehensive about going to the area after watching programmes like that.*

Male, 18 – 30, London

Participants described two factors influencing such impacts. Firstly, as noted above, some comedy and entertainment programmes do not always portray young people in an accurate or balanced way. While young people viewed these programmes as entertaining and as a result did not take the depictions of their age group too literally they were concerned that older age groups may not see them in this way, as discussed above.

Secondly, and linked to this, it has already been noted that the portrayal of young people is felt to be often skewed to the extremes. There was a concern that people from other age groups could generalise from extreme portrayals seen through the media to influence their perception of all young people.

So it's hard because, because it's always shown, you know, teenagers going out and getting drunk and beating people up, and whatever, the older generation stereotype and think that's what they're all like.

Female, 18 – 30, London

There was also seen to be greater potential for this impact to be realised where people from other age groups had, apart from their consumption of media coverage, limited interaction with younger people.

5 The representation and portrayal of older people

Key findings

- There is felt to be much less coverage of older people on television but in the discussions this did not seem to be that much of an issue for older audiences. Where it does matter more is the perceived lack of older women on TV – and this was not only mentioned by older women themselves.
- Where there is coverage of older people it is felt to be more balanced than for younger people.
- Negative portrayal revolves around the perceived incapacity of old people – physically, socially and mentally – and perceptions about a reluctance to move with the times and tendency to moan. It can also be felt to be mocking in tone, occasionally insulting and sometimes reliant upon outdated stereotypes.
- Positive portrayal is felt to stress their wisdom, expertise and experience which can make them effective role models.
- The limited representation of middle and older aged women on television was a key concern across all age groups but particularly for middle aged and older women.
- Participants from all age groups identified that media coverage could be out of step with the ageing society and did not always represent recent retirees or older people who are much more active and able than previous generations.
- Portrayal was praised for being largely positive and balanced in soaps and large audience dramas.
- There was acceptance that programme quality should come first and this can mean that negative, narrow or inaccurate representation can be appropriate in the right context, such as entertainment programmes and comedy, though this was more acceptable where it is older people making the joke.
- In contrast there was more concern over the portrayal of older people in news and factual programmes and the focus on health problems and vulnerability.
- Negative and unrealistic coverage of older people is felt to potentially result in them feeling insulted; feeling marginalised and increasing their fears of crime and health problems.

Following the detailed picture of attitudes towards the portrayal of young people provided in Chapter 4, this chapter describes participants' views on how older people are portrayed. In common with the portrayal of young people, this chapter draws primarily on views in relation to television. In contrast, however, it illustrates a set of views that is less consistent across all age groups on an issue that was not as evidently at the forefront of people's minds. The first section describes the range of ways participants felt that older people are portrayed in the media. Some key issues in relation to the accuracy and balance of this portrayal are discussed in the next section, with the final section reflecting on participants' views on the possible impact of the media portrayal of older people.

5.1 How are older people felt to be represented and portrayed?

The issue of age was not as central to older participants' understanding of themselves as it was for young people and they were generally less keen to be defined by their age. Nevertheless, once the discussion was prompted views tended to divide into two camps: that portrayal of older people is predominantly negative; or that portrayal is generally equally balanced between positive and negative. Irrespective of which of these broad views people held, there was in general much less concern from older people and other groups about the nature of the negative portrayal and the possible impact it could have when compared to views about the nature and impact of younger portrayal. This was also illustrated in the quantitative survey shown earlier where it was only 16-24s who had significant issues. It was clear, however, that in the specific area of age representation of middle and older aged women on TV there were some particular concerns.

5.1.1 Nature of the negative portrayal

Audience views

Despite the level of concern being lower than for younger people, there were some issues about the portrayal of older people that emerged in the discussions. Where raised, these issues were felt to relate to older people ageing (in relation to their health, their care, and their neglect) and invariably extended to them being unable to function in or contribute to modern society and as a result being depicted as a burden. There were three themes that were perceived to underpin this negative portrayal.

Participants identified older people as sometimes being negatively portrayed as **incapable** - physically, socially and mentally. This was described in relation to them being less active, less able to get around and '*not quite with it*' at best or at worst just waiting to end their life:

They're all just sitting in an armchair doing nothing...to show all old people sitting waiting for death to come, that's wrong, that's not very nice.

Female, 69 years, Edinburgh

These portrayals were felt to depict an underlying message that older people were on a downward trajectory in all aspects of their life ultimately resulting in them moving into a care home and dying.

A second key theme was that there is believed to be an underlying and consistent **mocking tone** in the portrayal of older people. Older people in particular said they are often the 'butt of the joke' or figures of fun.

F: The only thing they can come up with is comedy, which is quite surprising that old people obviously don't do much on the television apart from...

M: Make people laugh.

F: Exactly, be the butt of a joke.

Male and Female, 60 -75, Birmingham

This mocking was felt to revolve around their incapability as highlighted above, their moaning, with reference made to *One Foot in the Grave* and *Grumpy Old Men/Women* and their eccentric ways,

with reference to *The Kumars* and Dot in *Eastenders*. Whilst *Strictly Come Dancing* was commended as a programme that included contestants from a range of ages it was also felt to sometimes mock and at worst be exploitative of certain older contestants:

M1: I think they portray the older people in the wrong way. Ann Widdicombe, - when the researchers...look at people to go on the show, first and foremost they should really be looking whether people can dance a little. Well she couldn't dance hardly at all...

M2: Ann Widdicombe was there for a laugh.

Males, 60 – 75, London

We didn't like older people making a fool of themselves on telly, producers and directors ...are taking advantage and are using it for entertainment. An example of this would be [strictly] come dancing...its just embarrassing...I don't like seeing older folk being exploited.

Male, 72, Follow-up Interview

A final theme of the negative portrayal of older people was their perceived **inflexibility and stubbornness**. This image was conveyed by depictions of older people being set in their ways, being unable to move with the times and their capacity for moaning. A character in *Waterloo Road* was cited as an example of inflexibility:

The only person that I saw who was from the older age group, that's an older teacher who was very much opposed to any change at all, you know, and when the headmaster wanted to change a few things, he did everything in his power to stop them being changed...that did seem to me to be very negative that he was the only one who was opposing these things, and he was the oldest one in it.

Female, 60 – 75, London

Participants felt that where older people are portrayed in drama, comedy or entertainment, they are often peripheral or token figures. This was described as being '*props for other stories*' rather than the central character.

Views of the experts

The experts who took part in the research also acknowledged that television programmes can sometimes portray older people as the '*adorable idiot*' or infantilise their characterisation. Although they acknowledged that this may be authentic in some instances, it is not felt to be a balanced reflection on the current generation of older people who are increasingly mobile and are actively making the most of their retirement. They also acknowledged that the contribution of older people can sometimes be undervalued and their experience and knowledge sometimes ignored. An example of this was the replacement of Arlene Philips as a judge on *Strictly Come Dancing* with someone younger who had less experience in choreography.

The experts suggested that there is a greater proportion of younger people writing material for television which can restrict the life experience that is drawn on for the various scenarios which can then perpetuate the limited scope for older characters. Both broadcast and non broadcast experts commented that programme-makers need to recognise the fact that society is ageing and do more to represent the audience, particularly as the older age groups comprise a large proportion of the mainstream audience.

The same *Strictly Come Dancing* contestants were mentioned by experts as being both good and bad examples of the way older people are portrayed on television. For example, one of these contestants who provided entertainment rather than dancing acumen had helpfully conveyed the image that older people can have fun in retirement but was also cited as an example of broadcasters ridiculing older people. Additionally, when this contestant was compared with other

similar age contestants who danced well it was suggested that this was less to do with age and more about their physical appearance which resulted in them being an object of ridicule. Attractiveness was also referred to in discussions about the differences in representation in older men and women discussed more in section 5.1.3.

5.1.2 Positive portrayal

Conversely, participants were also able to identify positive portrayal where being older was seen as an advantage. This was described in relation to older people being wise and knowledgeable and being role models for others and was best illustrated where older people were central rather than peripheral to a programme.

Participants described examples of where the **experience** of older people was positively deployed in different types of programmes. For example, certain programme types were felt to require an older presenter with the gravitas to hold the audience. This included reference to older news readers as well as people like David Attenborough who were perceived to be better placed to explain serious issues or complex ideas.

I mean there's things, things like the Frozen Planet with David Attenborough...he's 80 odd...but he has earned his place. I mean that's just an inspiration.

Female, 60 -75, Edinburgh

This image of older people being experts was also conveyed through the presenters used on other specialist programmes like *Antiques Roadshow* or contestants on quiz shows such as *Eggheads* showing that older people are bright and intelligent, in contrast with the negative portrayals described above. Characters in soaps and dramas that were felt to reflect this positive portrayal, included the Dowager Countess from *Downton Abbey*, Patrick Trueman in *Eastenders* and Betty Turpin in *Coronation Street*. These were perceived as strong characters that did not seem to deteriorate as they aged. Younger people also felt these characters represented a positive portrayal as they 'stand up for themselves'.

Linked to their experience was the way older characters and presenters were felt to be effective **role models** passing their knowledge on to others. Again, David Attenborough was mentioned, in particular as a good role model to other older people as an example of what they could still achieve. Joanna Lumley was referenced in a similar fashion as were older characters in soaps that younger characters look up to. In a different context, *When Teenage Meets Old Age* was cited as a specific and vivid example of how older people can also be role models for younger people.

They [young people] didn't think they could cope and they even took them back to their own homes, and how shocked they were, the one taught him the a guitar, they were playing the guitar together, and it showed you that younger people could associate if they tried, they grow to love them, the one did, in the end; and I thought that was a good programme.

Female, 70 – 90, Cardiff

The final positive way that audience participants felt older people were portrayed was where they were **cast as central or pivotal characters** in a programme. A whole range of examples of drama and comedy programmes were mentioned that were felt to show pro-active older people contributing to society on a level playing field with people from other age groups, for example:

M: Especially, like, Murder, She Wrote and that...She's, like, proactive, isn't she? She's getting out doing things. .

F: She's still writing, isn't she, even though she's old?

Male and Female, 18 – 30, Birmingham

What about New Tricks? I mean that's a good one in terms of showing to middle aged and young people how people of my age can still make a valuable contribution.

Male, mixed age group, Edinburgh

Among the examples given were programmes like *Last of the Summer Wine* and *A Touch of Frost* which were viewed as positive but also as rather unrealistic and far fetched. This is discussed further in section 5.2.

Experts also referred to many of these programmes as providing positive portrayals of older people. Dramas, sitcoms and soaps were particularly highlighted as providing good opportunities for showing strong older characterisations and also ways of showing inter-generational relationships. New comedies such as *Trollied* and *Mount Pleasant* were cited as examples where the everyday scenarios such as a supermarket enable a diverse range of roles to be cast, including older people.

The kind of set up lends itself to that [including a diverse range of ages] anyway, ... because it's about real life so therefore it should come naturally.

Broadcast Expert

They also praised the way familiar older characters in soaps, such as Dot in *Eastenders*, have enabled important age-related issues to be addressed such as poverty, health and the care homes.

Dot's a good character isn't she? Dot as a carer and, and I think that's a really positive example of where, you know her experience as a carer and then coping after that, and all that that means is quite important. So I think drama has a huge role to play. You know, particularly articulating and explaining some of those big life transitions that people go through as they get older, bereavement or long term health conditions, or divorce or you know, there's a number of them.

Non Broadcast Expert

5.1.3 Age and other demographic characteristics

In contrast with the discussions amongst younger people, where there was broad agreement about the position of both men and women, gender differences emerged for middle and older aged people. The lack of representation of middle and older aged women on television was a key issue for audience participants. The issue was raised spontaneously and more strenuously by women in these age groups, but participants of all age groups described that age appears to be more of an issue for women than men in terms of representation in the media. Two sets of examples were identified.

Firstly, participants were keen to raise examples of female news readers or entertainment presenters who had lost their jobs allegedly due to their age and treated unfairly particularly when they had been replaced with what people felt were less qualified but younger, more attractive women.

Getting rid of all these older newsreaders, and bringing in [unclear] young, glamorous kind of females... you're kind of forgetting the older person... which they shouldn't because it's nice to grow up to older faces, and more mature faces, rather than just having women in their young 20s that haven't really got the experience.

Female, 31, Follow-up Interview

Related to this, some panel shows were also criticised for rarely having women represented or only having 'token women' on their programmes. Comedy shows, such as *QI* or *Mock the Week*, as well as current affairs programmes such as *Question Time* were implicated in this.

This phenomenon was brought into sharper focus for some participants when compared with the treatment of older male presenters. For David Attenborough, Bruce Forsyth and a host of news readers, participants felt that their age appeared to be seen as advantageous – consequently they are thought to be treated in a completely different fashion to older women. This was particularly apparent for participants when an older male presenter was often paired with a much younger woman. A similar comparison was made with radio, where older women are thought to appear more frequently. Annie Nightingale was referenced as an example as were others, who were perceived to have been ‘ousted’ from TV, even though this was not in fact the case.

People that have been rejected by television, perhaps because of their age...and turn up on radio, that's because you can't see them! It almost seems like you get sidelined because you're not as attractive or young looking for TV visually, but your skills are still there, so we'll utilise your skills by putting you on the radio where no one can really see you. I think it's atrocious.

Female, 46 59, Birmingham

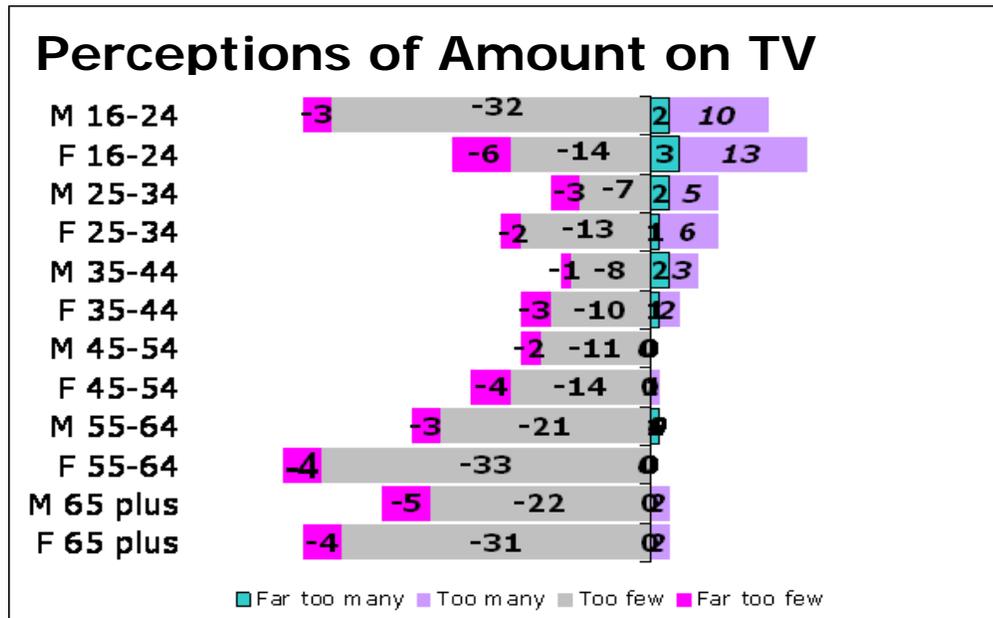
The implication of all of this, it was suggested, is that looks are more important than talent or expertise for older female presenters:

I get annoyed when I see all the women presenters all glamorous when it doesn't seem to matter what the men look like.

Female, 70, Follow-up Interview

As seen previously in Figure 5.1, the results from the BBC's Pulse survey on the amount of representation show that older people are more likely than average to have concerns that there are not enough people on screen of their age (32% v 19% overall). Looking in more detail, Figure 5.2 below shows that this concern is quite a bit higher amongst women in the older groups with 37% and 35% of women aged 55-64 and 65+ respectively feeling that there are too few women of their age represented on television.

Figure 5.1 What are your feelings about the amount of people you see of your age group on television (%)



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7^m -13^m November 2011, sample size 1789
Base size = 1789

Despite this, it should be noted that there was also a view that a concerted effort was being made to address this issue, for example, Joanna Lumley’s role presenting *A Greek Odyssey* was mentioned in this context. The Radio Times study cited in Chapter 1 suggests that there is objective evidence that things have improved for older women.

This underrepresentation of older women on television and the need to do something about it also emerged from discussions with both broadcast and non-broadcast experts. Experts stated that broadcasters need to do more to play a role in addressing what is seen as the society-wide issue of discrimination against women. Similar examples to those raised by the audiences were cited by experts, such as too few older women in news and factual programmes in particular and the on screen presence of an older man with a younger woman but no equivalent for older women. Attractiveness was often cited here as a possible reason in terms of it being ‘acceptable’ for a man to grow old but less so for a woman. It was acknowledged that it seemed to be easier for older women to get presenting positions on radio compared with television.

A further issue that was raised in relation to the representation of older people was that older black and minority ethnic people (BME) appear to be much less visible on television. Participants could think of few older men from a BME background on the television, and no older BME women.

5.2 Key issues in the portrayal of older people

The previous section described the ways in which participants felt older people are sometimes negatively portrayed. A second key question, of course, is the extent to which this emphasis on what is perceived as negative portrayal is accurate, and to what extent this matters to people. Similar issues were raised for older people as were raised for younger people, for example an acceptance by the audience that negative portrayal can also be accurate portrayal but that it is important that it is balanced to some extent by positive portrayal, particularly in certain genres. However, there is a more overarching issue that weaves through the views of the portrayal of older

people. While the portrayal of young people was felt to be skewed to the extremes the portrayal of older people was viewed as sometimes being out of step with the ageing society.

5.2.1 Portraying an ageing society

The changing nature of the age profile in the UK and the increasing numbers of people living longer was highlighted by the people we spoke to as an area which was not always properly portrayed by the media. Much of the focus of the media is felt to be on dealing with the challenges of larger numbers of much older people needing to access health services and care homes. The media is not however felt to be as good at considering the way the ageing society has also generated a large group of 'young old', those people who were once considered as old and therefore are stereotyped as such. Participants from all age groups identified that media coverage was often out of step with this demographic change and did not always represent those recent retirees or older people who are much more active and able than perhaps older people in previous generations.

This might have been accurate a few decades ago, not now...people are living longer and happier. Old people are fitter now, into fashion...but they don't portray this. The TV is behind the times.

Female, 25, Follow-up Interview

Older participants described how they did not even recognise that they would fit into the 'older person' age bracket as defined by the media. This was either because it had not even occurred to them or because they actively did not want to associate with the kind of portrayals described above:

I'm 65, I don't get up in the morning and think I'm an old git and go out to the Proms out there. I go out and just do me job... If you get a problem shoved in your face, it's different but you don't...when you see it on TV, people who get portrayed going out in the morning all miserable like EastEnders come out...

F: There's no old programmes out there that actually reflect how they behave.

Male, mixed age group, London

I find older people now are far younger. I'm riding motorcycles you know and I'm 73. I'm in to all sorts of things, it's a mental thing. This [media coverage] doesn't represent me.

Male, 70 – 90, Cardiff

Young people also often felt that a number of the common portrayals of older people in the media could be outdated. These participants were able to point to relatives and others they knew who confounded these stereotypes.

I'm not narrow-minded but I take everyone as they come, so I'm not going to look at that programme and think, 'Oh, all old men are like that', because I know they're not. I know old people that are switched on as much as I am.

Male, 18 – 30, London

Not all older people, however, were keen to encourage greater representation of their stage of life. Indeed there was a strong view articulated by some of the older participants particularly those aged 70 and above that they were glad their age group was not represented that well and they would not want to see more people of their age on TV. This reflects a more general finding that older age groups relate to and watch a whole range of programmes not just the ones supposedly depicting their age group.

I would think it's very difficult to make a good programme of old people...I wouldn't be interested in i.t

Male, 80+, Barnet

I don't care if my age groups represented or not.

Female, 80+, Barnet

These participants specifically argued that they wouldn't want lots of older people 'chasing down criminals' or 'ballet dancing':

It's pathetic to see those groups of women doing exercises, that's dreadful...I feel embarrassed for them and it's not entertaining.

Female, 80+, Barnet

As mentioned previously, experts acknowledged that broadcasters need to do more to represent and reflect the ageing population but in a way that doesn't perpetuate perceptions that older people are somehow different to the rest of the population. This includes being sensitive around the use of language and avoiding labelling people who happen to be older as a distinct group of people such as 'the elderly' or 'pensioners' or 'the old' which can serve to create 'a sense of other'. A lack of diversity in the portrayal of older people was also raised by experts and an acknowledgement that more needs to be done to reflect the range of voices, especially of the 'hidden voices' such as older and disadvantaged people. The media is felt to have an influential role in representing society and reinforcing both positive and negative stereotypes which can potentially have an impact on individuals.

5.2.2 Is accurate portrayal important?

While there was fairly widespread awareness of the sometimes narrow depiction of the ageing society and other negative aspects of the portrayal of older people, views were more diverse on whether this was actually important.

Three broad views emerged. Firstly, there was a concern that the negative stereotypes were not only unbalanced or unrepresentative but actually inaccurate, irrespective of the issues related to the ageing society. Even for much older people, it was felt that much of the negative coverage focusing on the limiting effects of getting older was inaccurate:

And it's all, like, my grandma's 90-odd and she can get upstairs herself and go out and stuff, so it's not, all old people shouldn't be shoved in homes and stuff, like it's kind of portrayed on the, on the TV.

Female, 18 – 30, Birmingham

A second view articulated was that, overall, older age portrayal was less of an issue than the portrayal of younger people even though they acknowledged that there was less representation of older people. Underpinning this view appeared to be a weaker self-identification with an age group; older participants who were less aware of age as part of their identity held more indifferent views on age portrayal:

I don't consider myself old.

Male, 80+, Barnet

Finally there was a view that many of the negative portrayals are actually accurate. While this was a view contested in some discussions by older people or those who worked with them, there were some older people who held this view. One way in which this was described was in relation to older

people being the butt of the joke. Younger people, for example, viewed some of the negative portrayals of older people as funny, particularly in some of the older sitcoms such as *Dad's Army* and *Are You Being Served*. There were also older people who were able to see the amusing side and viewed these portrayals more sympathetically. Others, however, were concerned about what they perceived as being the skewed nature of this portrayal and emphasised the need for more balance in the portrayal and representation of older people:

M: as long as it's (negative portrayal) not malicious...I don't think it's important as long as there is a variety of portrayal.

F: Yes, as long as there's a good balance.

Male and Female, 60 – 75, Birmingham

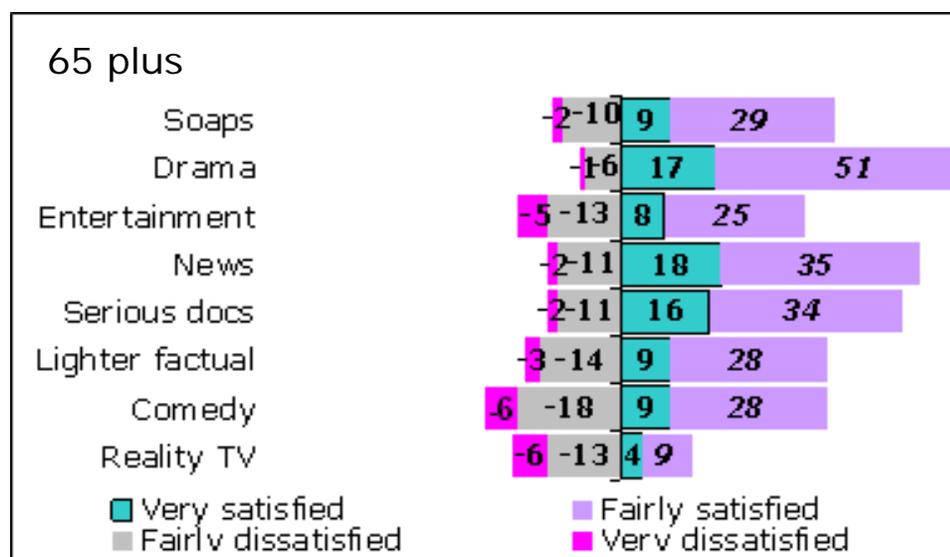
This wider range of views on the importance of accuracy reflects the more limited concern over the impact of age portrayal in the media on older people compared to the impact on younger people. This is discussed further in section 5.3 on impacts.

5.2.3 Genres and platforms

A number of the issues discussed above in relation to the ageing society and the importance of accuracy are played out in the different expectations participants had of the ways in which older people are portrayed and represented in different genres of television.

In the quantitative survey we asked people of different age groups how satisfied or dissatisfied they were with the way their age group was portrayed by different types of television programme. The chart below shows the results for those aged over 65. It shows the balance for most genres (other than reality TV) was tending to the positive – with the highest satisfaction for drama and the highest concern around comedy, reality TV and entertainment

Figure 5.2 How satisfied or dissatisfied are you with the way people of your age group are portrayed in the following types of programme



Source: Pulse 5 minex more, 7th-13th November 2011, sample size 1789
Base size = 1789

The discussions highlighted some of the reasons for this. As with the portrayal of younger people, **soaps and large audience dramas** were generally praised for their usually balanced representation of age, which was seen as important because they have the potential to influence. The age profile of characters in these types of television programme was seen as positive as was the fact that older characters sometimes took central roles. Views about the way older people were portrayed in individual programmes such as *Eastenders* or *Coronation Street*, was more varied, however, as they included those who perceived the portrayal to be positive and those who viewed it as negative.

Views on the portrayal of older people in **comedy** acknowledged that genre should have the license to stretch the truth. However, there were three distinct views on this. One perspective was that the accuracy of age portrayal is of limited importance in comedy and that as such it did not matter whether old people were negatively portrayed. Underpinning this view was a belief that older people are more thick-skinned than young people and also find it easier to laugh at themselves.

Older people can laugh at themselves a bit more than youngsters, I don't think they have the confidence to do that... they're more likely to take it to heart... by the time you get older you've got the confidence to just laugh it off. You know we'd be the first group to come up with all the names we get called you know.

Male, mixed age group, Edinburgh

A second view shared this assertion about older people being able to laugh at themselves but contrasted programmes made by and for older people with those made by and for younger people. For example, where *One Foot in the Grave* or *Last of the Summer Wine* may include some negative portrayal this was felt to be laughing at older people with a sense of empathy:

...say One Foot in the Grave, which is a horrible title, but with there, you're really laughing with him at things that have happened

Male, 60 – 75, London

Other so-called negative portrayals, particularly related to older people being the butt of the joke in family settings, such as *The Royle Family*, were also seen as acceptable as they reflected the reality of many families.

This was contrasted with the portrayal of older people in programmes predominantly centred on young people such as some comedy sitcoms or in some sketch shows where older people were depicted by younger people dressing up. These examples were seen as negative *and* inaccurate and therefore less acceptable and less amusing.

Sometimes if it doesn't work it can come close as just being nasty. I'm sure every younger person knows an older person that's grumpier, dodderier or whatever, it's just that they roll them all into this one person you know and it doesn't quite work.

Male, mixed age group, Edinburgh

A final view did not make this distinction and saw the majority of comedy as inaccurate and potentially reinforcing stereotypes.

An equally diverse set of views emerged out of the discussion of **entertainment shows**, including concerns over older participants in many talent shows being figures of fun (though it should also be said that participants also identified positive portrayals of older people in them). For example, Anita Dobson and Pamela Stephenson were cited as having success on *Strictly Come Dancing* competing with younger contestants. A second issue in relation to entertainment shows was a concern that the presenters cast for these programmes were getting younger. As discussed above,

this was felt to be particularly acute in regards to the limited presence of middle and older aged women in these roles.

This gender inequality was also identified as a concern in relation to **news and factual programmes**. There was concern that there were no female equivalents of David Attenborough and that male news readers were often much older than their female equivalents. Yet concerns were not just about the amount of coverage - there were also issues in relation to how older people are portrayed in news and factual programming. While one view was that older people were well represented and portrayed in most news coverage, an alternative perspective viewed news as too narrowly focused on health issues. Furthermore, other participants felt that age was often brought into a news story for no reason, taking away from the actual substance:

I mean they always have to put somebody's age. Why? There's times when you think, and Mrs Smith [is interviewed on the news], who is a next door neighbour, and her age is in it, and you think, what does it matter? Does it mean that she's 68 so has no idea of what she's saying because she's going doolally, or she's 68 and she's got all this experience so what she's saying is right. No, I'm no interested in it.

Male, 60 – 75, Edinburgh

5.3 Views on the impact of the portrayal of older people

As was made clear in the previous chapter, this study is not designed to measure the impact of the media on wider social attitudes and behaviours. What follows in this section is a description of participants' *perspectives* of the possible wider social impact of the media portrayal of older people. Participants identified possible impacts in the same areas as with young people: the impact on older people themselves and the impact on how older people are perceived by other age groups. These impacts were not, however, seen as being as severe as some of those identified in relation to young people. This in part appears to relate to the point made above in relation to older people feeling they are maybe less sensitive than younger people and less likely to identify with an age group or, consequently, notice age portrayal in the media. But there may also be a link to the fact that any impact on younger people is more likely to have a bigger effect on life outcomes given the stage young people are at in their life, reflected by the importance of how aspiration was portrayed for young people. This was a subject that did come up in the discussion of the portrayal of older people.

5.3.1 The impact on older people and how they are perceived

Older people and participants from other age groups identified three possible types of impact on this age group as a result of negative portrayal: engendering a feeling of offensiveness, marginalisation and increasing their fear of crime and health problems.

The perceived inaccurate portrayal of older people, particularly those who felt that their lifestyle was not represented at all, was upsetting for some older people. This was underpinned by the sense that media portrayals suggested that at 60 people are 'past it' and unable to contribute to society. Older people who did not identify with this depiction of a downward trajectory were upset by the implication that they were a burden on others:

*M: it's been recognised now that a lot of people are still bright and active, going up into their 80s, 90s. And it's respected I think a little bit more than it used to be perhaps.
F: I'm 74 and I still go to work if you don't mind.*

Older people reported experiencing similar views in the workplace and felt the media had the responsibility to try and change rather than reinforce this way of thinking.

I've found this at work, you got to an age and you get comments off the youngsters, "why the hell don't you retire out of it?" And you get that quite a lot in the workplace, and I find that, if you're capable of doing the job carry on and do the job.

Male, 70 – 90, Cardiff

This perception of being on a downward spiral was also offensive to older participants who felt that working or not, they had lots of experience to share and were perfectly able to engage in modern life.

A second impact was seen as a result of the specific negative portrayal that saw older people as having nothing to offer. There was a sense amongst older participants that this meant that their age group is rarely asked their opinion and talked down to when they are spoken to, despite the life experience they have. There was a view amongst some older people that this was in part reflected by the way news and other media coverage was put together:

I'm nae really ask for an opinion, because they wanting younger people's opinion as much as their opinion doesn't matter, and we've got the experience, we should be got to talk about things that younger people cannae...[I can] talk for myself, but I really object to that, when you're over 70 you're out of the equation.

Male, 60 – 75, Edinburgh

Older people felt that this needed to be corrected and that their age group was increasing in size and should be listened to more closely and frequently.

Finally, there was also a sense across age groups that news coverage reflecting the ageing society in a narrow way could generate fear amongst older people. Participants suggested that the focus on health issues and possible isolation and vulnerability some older people experience can make them frightened about what will happen to them. *Crimewatch* was given as an example of a programme that could make some older people feel more vulnerable and frightened.

6 Conclusions

It won't surprise readers to find that what audiences want from the media they consume is ultimately programmes and content that are both entertaining and of high quality. For broadcasters to deliver this most effectively it helps to have a sophisticated understanding of what drives audience judgements and the importance they attach to authentic representation and portrayal – after all, authenticity is in itself seen as an aspect of quality. This research sought to investigate the issue of 'age' as one aspect of this portrayal and representation and explore whether and how it resonates with audiences. As society ages and the demographic balance between young and old shifts it is a timely moment to explore this issue.

This report has provided evidence of audience and expert perceptions of age portrayal and representation in the media as a whole, but specifically across television, radio and the internet. In this final chapter we reflect on the key messages from this research and present some of the advice and suggestions proposed by participants in regard to the representation and portrayal of age in the media.

6.1 Key findings

The following key findings emerged from the research:

- **Audience participants generally agreed that one of the media's responsibilities is to try to accurately reflect society in all its diversity, and age is an aspect of this.** Experts shared this view and additionally stressed the dual role for the media – both mirroring society and challenging attitudes and stereotypes by providing positive role models.
- **Although the issue of how the media deals with age was not of immediate concern to most of the people we talked to (17% in the survey said they were dissatisfied, and this was mild rather than strong dissatisfaction) – on greater reflection some real issues did emerge.** The biggest of these centred around the **portrayal of younger people and older people (to a lesser extent) and a lack of middle aged and older women on television.**
- **The level of concern in the survey masked the wider range of responses articulated in the discussions.** Audience views ranged from those who said age was not an issue at all to those who viewed it as a primary issue because of the importance they attached to its potential to inform, educate and shape attitudes.
- **Age representation and portrayal was more of an issue for the audience on television (rather than on radio or the internet).** This was because: participants could not readily tell the age of contributors on radio, a perception that the audience/user chooses the radio station, programme or website that reflects their needs and interests, and the internet is seen to be so large, diverse and self selected that it is hard to imagine it as a unified entity in terms of how it portrays any age group.
- **Younger people were most concerned about how they are portrayed** – in the quantitative survey over 40% said they were dissatisfied with this. Although **there is perceived to be plenty of coverage of young people on television much of this portrayal is viewed as unduly negative** as the portrayal is seen to emphasise their involvement in risky behaviours, to indicate their disrespectful nature, and often suggests they live unproductive and vacuous lives. This portrayal is also perceived to result in potentially negative consequences for young people and can contribute to distrust between

generations. It is also felt to risk creating unrealistic expectations and unattainable goals for young people.

- **In contrast older people were more concerned about the amount of coverage of their age group rather than its portrayal** – older people were perceived by many audience participants as having less air time on television than other age groups. The actual portrayal of older people is viewed as being more balanced than for younger people – while it can sometimes be mocking in tone and occasionally insulting, it is felt to be more likely than for young people to emphasise their positive contribution to society. When there is negative portrayal of older people it is felt to revolve around their incapacity – physically, socially and mentally – and a perceived stubbornness to move with the times as well as a tendency to moan about things. Television portrayal is felt to sometimes be out of step with current demographic trends as it can appear to be overly reliant on rather dated and inaccurate stereotypes of older people. The negative coverage of older people is felt potentially to result in them feeling marginalised and can contribute to their anxieties about their health. In contrast, the positive coverage of older people is described as portraying their wisdom, expertise and experience.
- **The coverage of middle aged people was much less of an issue.** Whilst it was sometimes viewed as being narrowly focused on people experiencing some kind of mid life crisis, it was acknowledged that this was acceptable when used for compelling dramatic or comedic effect.
- **The primary issue, however, at this stage of life is seen to be the perceived lack of middle and older aged women on television.** This was typically a key concern across all age groups – of both genders - but particularly for middle aged and older women themselves (almost 40% in the survey felt there were too few on television). It was also an issue raised by the expert participants.
- The process in which people made judgements about age portrayal and representation involved them considering a number of different and potentially competing factors. This juggling of factors resulted in them arriving at sometimes contradictory judgements about age portrayal and representation.
- Not surprisingly **the type or genre of programme is a primary factor differentiating views of age portrayal and representation.** If the content of the programme is serious and factual then the way *age is portrayed or depicted* is more important and there is felt to be a greater need for it to be balanced and accurate. Generally the need for programme quality and ‘creative licence’ can override concerns of negative, narrow or inaccurate portrayal in drama, entertainment and comedy. *Age representation* – that is the amount of people of different ages - appears more important for dramas and soaps.
- Beyond programme type both *portrayal and representation* is more important when:
 - A programme has a capacity to make a bigger impact because it attracts a large audience
 - Age as an issue personally resonates with the viewer
 - The channel or broadcaster has a public service remit

6.2 Advice and suggestions

We now turn to the advice and suggestions that participants made for how to ensure age portrayal and representation is covered in as authentic and creatively engaging way as possible. Audience participants were asked to consider any general advice they would like to give to commissioners and programme makers as well as any specific messages in relation to their own age group. Broadcast and non broadcast experts were asked for their reflections for the CDN about the best way to promote diversity and share best practice across the broadcast industry.

6.2.1 Audience: advice and guidance

As would be expected audience participants reflections were concerned with addressing any issues they had with the way age is currently represented and portrayed. For this reason it is important to preface this discussion by saying that views varied about whether there is a need for change or improvement. This was either because age was not an issue for them or due to them believing that the media - and specifically television as so much of the discussion focused on this medium - does a good or good enough job of representing and portraying age.

They had three key messages:

1. **High quality entertainment is key** - The first of their messages was programme makers should be focused on producing programmes that are entertaining to watch and of a high quality and that this ultimately outweighs any concerns about age portrayal and representation.

Worry about the quality of the programmes or how entertaining it is or how it's written I think that's what they need to focus on...programme makers should know that they need to put quality into the programmes rather than thinking about targeting a specific age.

Male, 18 -30, Edinburgh Video Blog

Television's solely about entertainment, that's what it is.

Male, mixed age group, Edinburgh

2. Having said that, a key issue highlighted was the need to **ensure a more balanced, positive and accurate portrayal of all age groups than exists at the moment**. This was seen as a particular issue for news and factual programmes which people are felt to take more seriously in forming their views about what a particular age group is like. As has been mentioned throughout the report there is some concern about the way different ages are sometimes at best presented as slightly humorous but exaggerated caricatures and at worst as negative stereotypes. Addressing some of their specific concerns about older and younger people and middle aged women their recommendations included:

- The **images of older people may need to be updated and aligned so they present a more realistic portrayal of the youthful and active way many people over 60 live**. Participants in their 70s encouraged programme makers to come out and meet them so that they can update their knowledge and appreciate the wide range of capabilities that older people have.

I think you've got to remember that older people still think young and if they can fit that into their portrayal on screen, it'll come across a lot better, you know.

Male, 70 – 90, Cardiff

This it was suggested would help to make young people more aware of the contribution and value of older people.

- There is an opportunity to give **a more balanced portrayal of young people showing more of their accomplishments, intelligence and talents**. This appeared to be more of an issue for serious factual programming, soaps, sitcoms, chat shows and reality TV.

Especially with my age, obviously going out and having fun and getting drunk is part of what my age and my culture do but I think there's other things like for example I've got a job I've had a degree I look after 30 children a day so obviously its not all drugs, sex, parties and stuff so I think it needs to be a mixture of both.

Male, 18-30, Birmingham, Video Blog

Age is a big factor in how it's depicted in the media, I think for myself, my age group in certain situations and certain programmes it's portrayed in a very bad way but then there are other situations and programmes where it's a good way. It doesn't really bother me but thinking about it and thinking about an older age generation and then watching the younger generation programmes that's kind of the views of probably how they view the younger, the public and its not always the right way so I kind of think that maybe some of the younger generation programmes need to portray the younger generation in a bit of a better way

Female, 18 – 30, London, Video Blog

- And the audience would welcome **more middle and older aged women on television** providing positive role models and greater gender equality:

I would like to see all ages represented fairly and that women of a certain age are not got rid of just because they are seen to be less attractive than their much younger counterparts and that sort of you know, mature intelligent women such as Moira Stewart who's now doing an excellent job on Chris Evans, and Angela Rippon [...] still have a very valid contribution to make and they are excellent role models and people whether they like it or not do take on messages via the media.

Female, 46-59, Birmingham, Video Blog

3. At the same time, programme makers have to **manage the tension between accuracy and the need to make content that is entertaining and engaging**. Audience participants were very aware that whilst they were requesting that programme makers delivered a more authentic and accurate portrayal of their lives at the same time they as viewers want to be entertained and for the media to '*transport them from their daily lives*' – providing a means to switch off. For this reason they emphasised that **their desire for more balanced portrayal is of greater concern for factual rather than non factual programming**.

If the media was honest all the time, and realistic in the way it portrayed everyone, no one would watch TV, or it would be so boring because there would be nothing to escape to.

Male, 18 - 30, Edinburgh

Young/Female/London: 'There has to be a balance between entertainment and portraying reality and it is difficult, it depends on each type of programme.

Female, 18-30, London Video Blog

It has to be fair, it has to be balanced, but it also has to be entertaining.

Female, 46 – 59, Birmingham

6.2.2 Experts: advice and guidance

The broad messages from the experts echoed and built on those of the audience. Not surprisingly they inevitably made more concrete and specific suggestions.

They made four main recommendations:

1. To **recognise the importance of age without giving it an unduly prominent focus amongst other diversity issues**. Underpinning this view was a clear concern that too much preoccupation with age might result in compromising the quality and editorial standards of programmes by artificially creating age bands that are not recognisable to those in them. Non broadcast experts were understandably (given their background) much more vocal about the need to prioritise age more in commissioning and programme making.

2. The need to find **more imaginative and creative ways to challenge existing age stereotypes without being formulaic and setting quotas.**

I would say in relation to portraying everyone, challenge stereotypes but don't start to get, you know, too formulaic about it and don't start to introduce loads of rules that say, 'We need, you know, we need six women over 60 on BBC channels each week', because that is the way disaster lies in my view.'

Broadcast Expert

[Not] a jumble of quotas [of age, sexual orientation, ethnicity] which would be very anti-creative.

Broadcast Expert

Specific suggestions were made that highlighted a desire for more imaginative and creative character formulation and more adventurous and experimental casting. In addition it was suggested that an annual event to celebrate age portrayal across the industry might help to raise the profile of this issue and encourage programme makers to give it more focus.

So one of the things is to think through what are the processes to aid and prompt programmers to think about population as a whole? ..There's a degree of internal processes which aid and facilitate and encourage, and then direct links to customer feedback, to ensure that you're getting that loop of information, which can tell you what your customers are thinking.

Non Broadcast Expert

Every year people should celebrate what they've achieved....have a date where [broadcasters] have to say I've done X, Y, Z better.

Broadcast Expert

During this discussion the BBC was specifically singled out as being in a good position because of its greater financial security to lead the way in embracing positive and balanced portrayal.

A corporation like the BBC probably has more flexibility to be able to say, let's try something out, than because they have a steady income that's not going to flop if something doesn't work, than a company like ITV who's critically dependent upon getting income in; and therefore I would expect the BBC to lead, rather than to lag.

Broadcast Expert

3. The need to **more accurately reflect the age distribution in the population including the range of diversity and attitudes as well as improving the representation of older women.**

This reflects the suggestions that audience participants made. It was also proposed that programme makers could involve stakeholders and younger and older people more in the programme making process to help to challenge preconceptions and find more positive role models.

Young people have lots of ideas, everything from getting more youth reps on factual programmes, to having more conversations with young people about the content. And I think it's just taking them in a room with those people who actually make those decisions. Also, you know, increasing knowledge on both sides of how they contact each other when they have an issue would be really helpful.

Non Broadcast expert

There are some issues here that actually would make television and the media better not worse ... the age of the population the available reach of the population. I think

points like new talent doesn't need to be young talent are ways in which you can express it which make it create a positive.

Broadcast Expert

4. Finally, alongside these more imaginative ways it was also suggested that there is a need to **track and review progress on portrayal of age** by for example endeavouring to ensure the workforce (production staff, script writers, editors etc), content of programmes and talent used is more representative of the age distribution in the general population. A particular issue raised was the need to nurture women in their 30s and 40s and be mindful of how policy changes and practices can impact on all staff but specifically women at this particular life stage.

I think it's about nurturing women through that, that sort of tipping-point of probably their, what, sort of late 30s, early 40s, where a lot of women are, are shed, in a sense, so I think there is something around encouraging, nurturing, mentoring, supporting women at that stage.

Broadcast Expert

I think recognising that it's an issue, across the organisation. So in HR and training and everything else. I think providing targeted mentoring and training, to people. Not just women, but people, at key stages in their career.

Non Broadcast Expert

6.3 Concluding remarks

In arriving at a single conclusion from this research there might be a temptation on the one hand to dismiss age as an issue as it is not a primary concern, or, conversely, to overplay the significance of the feelings about negative portrayal of younger people and, to a lesser extent, older people and the invisibility of middle and older aged women. Whilst these are important messages this research showed that there is a need to view age portrayal and representation in the broader context as it is hard to disentangle age from the many other, often more prominent, ways that people identify and represent themselves.

That said, it is possible that participants dismissed the importance of age too easily because they, typically, had not thought about age portrayal and representation before taking part in the research and then struggled to engage with the concept once it was raised. The follow up interviews with 40 of the audience participants provides a limited understanding of how views developed after the workshops and focus groups. Based on these interviews it seemed that participants took more notice of age and its portrayal and representation after taking part in these discussions. This either consolidated their existing perceptions, or in some cases broadened them. In the case of the latter they described feeling more sympathetic to the way other age groups are portrayed and, as a consequence, their views mellowed or, conversely, they were reinforced and strengthened about the importance of age portrayal. So this suggests that within the limited time frame that we were working age did become more salient to them but not to a huge degree once participants are asked to engage with the subject. Of course we have no way of knowing what will happen in the longer term.

But it is worth repeating that above all, it is ultimately the quality of the programme content and its capacity to inform and/or entertain that will sustain the engagement of audiences in the future. Ensuring accurate and authentic representation and portrayals of people of different ages can only help in this – in the end authenticity is a component of quality for the viewer.

Appendix A Technical Appendix

Overview of our research approach

In order to capture the audience views of how age is depicted in the broadcast media we employed a range of qualitative research techniques - deliberative workshops, focus groups and depth interviews (more detail on these is set out below). This combined research design enabled us to explore views about a subject that participants often found difficult to conceptualise as they typically had not considered the subject before taking part in the research. A flexible, responsive and exploratory approach enabled us to generate richer and more detailed insights investigating the more subtle and complex factors that underpinned views and judgements about age portrayal. Our research design involved the following components:

- **A short scoping stage**, in which we reviewed existing research published by media organisations as well as academic and third sectors. This framed the areas of focus of previous work and enabled this research to build on previous findings as appropriate.
- **Three day long deliberative workshops:** covering 122 people in all. These were held in Birmingham, Edinburgh and London over three successive weekends with a cross section of people aged between 18 to 75 years – Table 1 below provides a profile of each workshop design. During the workshops, participants worked with moderators in different sized groups and age bands – both their own age group as well as mixed age groups – and they engaged with a range of diverse stimulus material – including show cards to explore different types of programme, talent boards containing male and female celebrities and a show reel of clips from a range of broadcasters providing a montage of examples of how age is portrayed on television and radio. These workshops enabled us to expose participants to a wider range of age groups and perspectives than would be feasible in a standard focus group format so we were able to combine age, gender and social class in a more diverse yet ‘harmonious’ way. Exposing participants to a broader spectrum of people from a wider range of backgrounds and circumstances enabled them to broaden their perspectives to think more deeply about their initial responses and to debate the pros and cons of each.

The rationale for choosing a deliberative approach was to give participants more time to reflect on the topic and absorb information. This enabled them to move beyond ‘knee jerk’ reactions to how age is portrayed and to capture their more thoughtful and nuanced views of perceived authenticity. This has allowed us to reach a more meaningful understanding of how different age groups perceived the depiction of age in the broadcast media.

- **A series of focus groups** were held for people in the oldest and youngest age bands as we were concerned that a workshop might be harder for them to engage with. **Two focus groups were held with young people in Liverpool** – these were split by age (13 – 15 and 16 – 19 years) so that we could engage with young people at different developmental stages separately. **Five mini focus groups were held with older people aged 70 and over** (four of these were with people in their late 70s and one in their early 80s and one group with people in their 80s and early 90s). Finally **two additional focus groups were added to the design to ensure coverage of people aged 18 to 75 years living in Northern Ireland**. The focus groups in Belfast mirrored the design and sample profile of the workshops but they were of a much shorter duration in length. Table 2 overleaf profiles the design of each of the focus groups.
- All participants attending a workshop or focus group were asked to keep a **media diary** prior to taking part in the research. This asked them to consider the way people are

portrayed in the media. It did not specifically focus on age as we did not want to lead them specifically to considering age portrayal before they took part in the workshop or focus group.

- We **filmed** a number of the participants after each workshop and focus group in Cardiff and Liverpool capturing their reflections on taking part in the research.
- About one to two weeks after the workshops and focus groups we **followed up a sub-sample of 40 participants on the phone**, to explore their reactions to age portrayal in more detail.
- We carried out **14 investigative interviews with** eight broadcast experts and six non broadcast experts - in person or over the phone. The purpose of these interviews was to understand how experts operationalise their thinking about the portrayal of age in the broadcast media. The interviews with non broadcast experts were with representatives of organisations that promote and support particular age groups or of non-broadcast organisations within the media industry who have expressed a particular perspective on these issues. This enabled us to consider any wider issues bound up with the media's influence and responsibility in reflecting society. Clearly this is a modest sample size – but including these interviews alongside the work with audiences enabled us to collate a more rounded understanding of all of the perspectives of the role of the media in age portrayal.
- The survey component consisted of placing questions measuring feelings about age portrayal across TV, radio and internet on:
 - An external Omnibus survey run by a research company called ICM – which surveyed 2,027 people aged 18 and over between 30 Sept and 2 Oct 2011.
 - BBC's own Pulse Survey – both the Pulse Survey which surveyed 9,076 people aged 16 and over between 24 Oct and 30 Oct 2011 and the Pulse 'Omnibus' Survey which interviewed 1,789 people aged 16 and over and 718 people aged between 12 and 15 years between 7 Nov and 13 Nov 2011.

Appendix Table A.1 Overview of the workshop design	
Day long workshops	Sample criteria

Birmingham (rural area) – 40 participants	ABC1 18 – 75 Men and women (interlocked with age) Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
Edinburgh – 43 participants	C2DE 18 – 75 Men and women (interlocked with age) Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
London – 39 participants	B-D 18 – 75 Men and women (interlocked with age) Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
Base: Workshop participants	122

Appendix Table A.2 Overview of the focus group design

Focus groups	Sample criteria	
Belfast – 2 focus groups with 18 people (aged 18 – 75)	ABC1 18 – 45 Men and women (interlocked with age) Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement	C2DE 46 – 75 Men and women (interlocked with age) Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
Liverpool – 2 focus groups with 19 young people	A – E 13 - 15 years Boys and girls Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement	A - E 16 - 19 years Boys and girls Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
Cardiff – 4 mini focus groups with 17 older people	ABC1 70 – 90 Men and women Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement	C2DE 70 – 90 Men and women Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
	ABC1 70 – 90 Men and women Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement	C2DE 70 – 90 Men and women Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement
London – 1 mini focus group with 4 older people	BC1C2 80+ years Men and women Different ethnic origin Different patterns of media engagement	
Base: Focus group participants	58	

As this was a qualitative study the rationale in selecting the sample was not to recruit a statistically representative sample of all people but to ensure diversity of coverage across certain key variables (purposive sampling). Eligibility for the research was determined using a short screening

questionnaire and quotas were set in order to prescribe the distribution of the sample selected. The sample was selected across six locations across the UK.

To ensure consistency of coverage across the workshops, focus groups and interviews facilitators followed a detailed topic guide¹ that outlined the topics that were to be addressed (See Appendix B). Although topic guides help to ensure systematic coverage of key issues across interviews, they are used flexibly, to allow issues of relevance for individual respondents to be covered through follow up questioning.

The workshops, focus groups and interviews were recorded and transcribed, and then analysed using 'Framework', a rigorous analytical method developed by NatCen Social Research. This approach involves producing a series of thematic worksheets which allow for the full range of views and experiences to be compared and contrasted in a comprehensive and systematic way, both within and across workshops, focus group and interviews. It also ensures the findings are grounded in and driven by the accounts of audience and industry participants.

Profile of the audience sample

A total of 180 people took part in the qualitative component of the audience research ranging in age from 13 to 92 years. Participants were recruited to meet certain quotas prescribing their age, gender ethnicity, socio-economic group and media consumption as outlined in Table A.3. overleaf. The 180 participants selected were a good cross section of the sample profile we set out to achieve. Table A.4 provides a profile of the 40 participants who were willing to be followed up after the workshops and focus groups. This broadly reflects the profile of the overall audience sample.

Appendix Table A.3 Profile of the audience sample

	Males	Females	Total age
Age and Gender			
13 - 17 years	6	7	13
18 – 30 years	19	20	39
31- 45 years	17	19	36
46 -59 years	20	17	37
60 – 75 years	19	27	46
76+ years	6	3	9
Total gender	87	93	180
Social Grade			
ABC1	89		
C2DE	91		
Ethnicity			
White	141		
Asian	18		
Black	19		
Mixed	2		
Other	0		
Media consumption			
Watch television 3+ times a week	180		
Listen to the radio 3+ times a week	168		
Use internet every day	144		
Sexual Identity			
Heterosexual / Straight	166		
Gay/ Lesbian	4		
Bisexual	0		
Other	0		
Not asked (under 16 years)	10		
Religion			
Christian	147		
Buddhist	0		
Hindu	6		
Muslim	5		
Sikh	4		
Jewish	3		
Other religion	3		
No religion	3		
	12		
Base: Audience members	180		

Appendix Table A.4 Profile of the follow up sample

	Males	Females	Total Age
Age and Gender			
13 - 17 years	2	0	2
18 – 30 years	3	6	9
31- 45 years	2	6	8
46 -59 years	3	5	8
60 – 75 years	6	5	11
76+ years	1	1	2
Total age/gender	17	23	40
Social Grade			
ABC1	22		
C2DE	18		
Ethnicity			
White	29		
Asian	3		
Black	8		
Mixed	0		
Other	0		
Media consumption			
Watch television 3+ times a week	40		
Listen to the radio 3+times a week	37		
Use internet every day	35		
Sexual Identity			
Heterosexual / Straight	39		
Gay/ Lesbian	0		
Bisexual	0		
Other	0		
Not asked	1		
Religion			
Christian	34		
Buddhist	0		
Hindu	1		
Muslim	1		
Sikh	0		
Jewish	0		
Other religion	0		
No religion	4		
Base: Follow up interviewees	40		

Appendix B Topic Guide

P3133 – Serving all ages

Workshop Topic Guide

Broad Workshop Aims:

- General perceptions about the importance of age and the way it is viewed within society
- Explore views about the way age is portrayed across different media platforms (television, radio and the internet) and channels (BBC, ITV, Channel 4,) and types of programme (news, drama, comedy, entertainment)
- Understand how views vary according to different characteristics and contexts (platform, channel, type of programme)
- Explore the role of the media in portraying age
- Suggestions for how to ensure age portrayal is covered in an authentic and creatively engaging way; identify key criteria for ensuring this
- *Specific questions that the research needs to answer are in bold and italics*

Welcome and Housekeeping (plenary session)

- Welcome and introductions
- Aims of the day
- Run through the programme
- Introduce the ground rules and research issues
- Introduce the issues board and video blogs
- Housekeeping
- Any questions

4 Breakout groups

1. Facilitator introduction

- Briefly explain aim of morning session
- Confirm that the focus is on the media in general – so television, radio and the internet

Online: By online we mean bespoke written content available via the internet such as news websites, blogs or social media sites (e.g. Facebook, Twitter) and not television or radio programmes available on demand such as 4OD or BBC IPlayer,

- Voluntary participation
- Explain confidentiality and recording
- Group rules and video blogs

2. Group introductions

- Group introductions; name, who they live with at home
- Break into pairs – ask them to reflect on how people like them are represented in the media; what does the media do well or badly (ask them to use examples from their diary)
- 3 minutes per person in turn, listening and talking

3. General perceptions about how people are portrayed in the media

- How are people like you portrayed in the media
Probe:
 - What does the media do well/badly
 - Can they give some examples to illustrate where media portrays them well/less well
- ***What is the media's role in reflecting people/wider society (vs. just being entertaining)***
Probe:
 - ***What role should the media have in portraying people/wider society***

4. General perceptions of age in the media

- How is age depicted and portrayed in the media (let them pick the media that comes to mind);
Probe
 - Which age groups are covered and how are they portrayed
 - How does the coverage of different age groups vary (any groups that get too much coverage/too little coverage)
 - Are there any age groups that are particularly positively or negatively covered
 - Has this changed over time; in what ways
- ***Can they think of some good and bad examples of the way people of different age groups are portrayed on the media***
Probe:
 - What makes them good/bad acceptable or unacceptable portrayal
 - Where are the boundaries for acceptability (when does it become unacceptable);
 - ***How does it compare for TV, radio and online; probe for specific examples if possible***

- **How well has the media portrayed the interaction between generations (parents and children, grandparents etc); reasons why it is good bad**
Probe:
 - **Can they provide any specific examples where this has been done well/badly**
 - **What impression has this conveyed (i.e whether there is perceived to be a disconnect between different generations)**

- **Does it matter how their age group is portrayed in the media; reasons why/why not**
Probe:
 - **Does it matter how other age groups are portrayed in the media**
 - **How strongly do they feel about it compared to other concerns about the media**

- **Is the amount of coverage about age an issue to them; reasons why; why not**
Probe:
 - **Has it changed over time; in what way (better or worse)**
 - **How do their views vary for the amount of coverage of men and women of different age groups– particularly older women vs older men**

- **What is the role of the media in shaping society's attitudes on age**
Probe:
 - What is the role of the media in representing people of different age groups (vs. entertaining and making good content)

5. Variations in the way age is portrayed

- **How does the way age is portrayed on the television compare with radio**
Probe:
 - **Does it matter how they each approach it**
 - How does it compare with the internet; and reasons why it is similar/different

- **How does the way age is portrayed differ across different broadcasters/channels/stations/web sites**
Probe:
 - **Does it matter how they each approach it**
 - Can they describe how it is different (where appropriate)
 - (If struggling use an earlier example): so you mentioned XXX as being particularly good or bad; how typical is that of the way C4/BBC1/BBC2 etc covers age

- Is it okay for different broadcasters to take a different approach (e.g. Channel 4 vs BBC)
 - What about other channels; reasons why they are different/similar
 - What about different radio channels; compare Radio 1-4, Heart, Magic, Classic FM; what about other radio channels
- ***How does the way age is portrayed vary for different types of programmes;***
 - ***How important is it that different types of programmes deal with age in different ways***
 - ***How important are programme trails; what (if any) effect do they have on them; and how important are they in encouraging them to watch a programme***

Reflections on the morning (plenary session)

Lunch, socialising and video blogs

DVD stimulus (plenary session)

Afternoon breakout groups

6. Group introductions

- Group introductions; name; what colour group were they in for the morning and (briefly) what was the main point that they took away from their morning discussion

7. Reflections on the DVD stimulus

- What did they think about the clips
- ***How typical were the clips of the way their age group (so 'young', 'middle aged', '50+ group) is portrayed on television; in what way were they different***
Probe:
 - ***How typical was it of the other age groups***
 - ***How was it similar/different; more positive/negative; in what way***
 - ***How important is it whether it was authentic***
- As a group can they select one clip (see attached list of clips) that was particularly good at accurately conveying their age group;
Probe:
 - Explore reasons for selecting this clip and how views vary about the clip across the group

- As a group can they select one clip that was particularly bad at conveying their age group
 - Explore reasons for selecting this clip and how views vary about the clip across the group
- These are all clips from television; how does this compare with their views about the way age is portrayed on the radio or internet
- What words are typically used to convey people of different age groups by the media

Probe:

 - What images do these words convey (e.g. positive/negative imagery)
 - How does it vary for people of different age groups
 - How does it vary across different media (TV, radio, online)
- What generalisations and stereotypes does the media use to portray people of different age groups (e.g. young people as lazy, drinking and having sex, or as teenage parents, old people as being past it and grumpy, middle aged people as having a mid-life crisis)

Probe:

 - How accurate are these generalisations
 - Is it ever okay or acceptable to portray young, middle aged, old in this way (i.e. in a comedy programme, drama, a factual programme)
 - Is it ever okay to criticise people of different age groups (young, middle aged, older people)

8. **Consideration of talent boards to really understand and explore what underpins views**

- How accurately the celebrities represent people of different age groups - young people, middle aged people and older people
- Does it matter whether celebrities reflect young people, middle aged people and older people
- How their views about celebrities on television compare with views about radio/internet
- Does it matter how accurately age is portrayed in different types of television and radio programmes; reasons for this
- When does it matter; for which types of programme; reasons why
- When doesn't it matter; for which types of programmes (e.g. factual programmes vs. comedy and drama)
- How important is the **gender of the celebrity**; and how does it affect their views about the way age is portrayed across these different types of programmes

Probe:

- Specific programme types covered by the talent photos: Drama/comedy/News and current affairs/Sport and entertainment/Serious factual programmes/Lighter factual programmes
 - Compare radio, internet and television
- How important is the **personality and the appearance** of the celebrity; and how does that affect their views about the way age is portrayed across different types of programmes (e.g. is a bubbly personality necessary for a lighter factual programme but less important for a serious factual programme)
Probe:
 - Specific programme types covered by the talent photos: Drama/comedy/News and current affairs/Sport and entertainment/Serious factual programmes/Lighter factual programmes
 - Compare radio, internet and television
 - How important is the **experience and knowledge** of the celebrity; and how does it affect their views about the way age is portrayed across different types of programmes (e.g. very important for serious factual programmes)
Probe:
 - Specific programme types covered by the talent photos: Drama/comedy/News and current affairs/Sport and entertainment/Serious factual programmes/Lighter factual programmes
 - Compare radio, internet and television

9. Advice to the CDN/commissioners and programme makers

- How important is age; how does it compare with other diversity issues like disability etc.
- What advice would they give the media about how to portray age effectively
Probe:
 - How would they address their concerns about the way age is represented in the media
 - Is there a role for programme trails; what role (e.g. positively portraying people of different age groups)
 - Any specific guidelines
- Where should the media draw the line between accurately portraying age and providing entertainment and information
- What are the critical considerations that should be made by broadcasters when portraying age
Probe (only if time):
 - How much freedom should they have (dramatic license)
 - How important is it that the portrayal is authentic
 - How important is it that the portrayal is representative of all ages

- How important is the expertise of the individual vs the need for age to be handled in an appropriate and sensitive way
- To answer.....*'The one thing the media could do to reflect my age group better would be.....'*
- What are the top 5 tips you would give to broadcasters and commissioners

Consent forms

Tea

Final reflections (plenary session)

- Reflections on key messages from their discussion and how they feel about the way age is portrayed in the media
- What are the key messages to report back to commissioners and programme makers
- Issues Board
- How much (if at all) have their views changed over the day; in what ways
- Remind them about video blogs

Video blogs