Is social inequality perpetuated through media discourse? A critical discourse analysis of representations of ethnicity in the Manchester Evening News

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ABSTRACT

The mass medias play an important role in constructing the audience's notions of selfhood, concepts of gender and class, beliefs regarding ethnicity and race, ideas about nationality, and what creates 'us' and 'them' (Kellner, 1995). Opinions of ethnic minority groups can be created, influenced, and destroyed by the way these groups are portrayed in the media. Literature suggests ideologically dominant groups which control the media (white, middle class, males; Foster, 2004) ensure minority groups are portrayed as 'others' to protect their own economic interests.

This study examines the way ethnic minority groups are represented in three articles taken from the Manchester Evening News (MEN). These articles are analysed using the first three stages of Fairclough’s (2001) framework of critical discourse analysis.

The discussion is integrated with the analysis. The results suggest that the text producers used semiotic practices to simultaneously portray minority groups as 'others', and the reader as belonging to (or associating with) the ideologically dominant group. Other practices are also identified which the text producers employ to misrepresent ethnic minority groups.

Reflexive considerations, critical evaluations of the study, and suggestions for further research are also discussed.
Introduction

Review of background literature: Media and racialised discourse

The mass media is a powerful tool for those who control it; Kellner (1995) describes how ‘radio, television, film and the other products of media culture provide materials out of which we forge our very identities’ (p.5). Wimmer and Dominick (2006) describe the mass media as ‘any form of communication that simultaneously reaches a large number of people’ (p.2). Notions of selfhood, gender and class, beliefs regarding ethnicity and race, ideas about nationality, and what creates ‘us’ and ‘them’ are all systematically moulded by this cultural institution (Kellner, 1995). Bauman (1992) suggests the media is ‘the most powerful influence on the shape of contemporary culture’. Urbanised living exposes the individual to a large degree of media messages; only a small amount of us remain untouched by the messages interwoven into the media channels we regularly experience (Talbot, 2007). The media supplies us with information regarding our environment, which in turn shapes the ‘attitudes and beliefs’ we hold (Mahtani, 2001). Van Dijk (2000) suggests ‘media discourse is the main source of people’s knowledge, attitudes and ideologies, both of other elites and of ordinary citizens’ (p. 36). Many people construct their understandings of society based on information retrieved through media channels; in this way, the media creates ideology (Zhao & Postiglione, 2010).

It is essential to clarify the concepts of ‘race’ and ‘ethnicity’, in terms of epidemiology. Ethnicity is a multifaceted phenomenon (Isajiw, 1993), as too is race, the two often being used interchangeably despite intrinsic differences (Bhopal, 2004). A lay understanding of ‘racism’ draws associations between subjugation and race (Sommers & Norton, 2006); as such, an understanding of race is needed to examine racism (Bhopal, 2004). However, the accreditation of the concept of ‘race’ has frequently fallen under critique (Littlefield, Lieberman & Reynolds, 1982; Lieberman, Kirk & Littlefield, 2003). Lieberman, Kirk and Corcoran (2003) suggest this is due to the development of ‘empirical evidence [intra-group differences being greater than inter-group differences; Zuckerman, 1990], new theoretical approaches, and the sensitizing assistance of historical events [such as the Holocaust]’ (p.18). Bhopal (2004) suggests that ‘race’ refers to the ‘sub-species’ that an individual’s phenotypical characteristics dictate they belong to; these being dependant on ancestral and geographical origins. He then defines ‘ethnicity’ as ‘the social group a person belongs to, and either identifies with or is identified with by others, as a result of a mix of cultural and other factors’ (p.443). Betancourt and López (1993) suggest that through intra-group interactions ethnicity becomes a means by which culture is transmitted, as opposed to the passive agency of race.

The persisting media misrepresentations of minority groups socialise the viewing audience to accepting that this inaccurate information is fact (Holtzman, 2000). As such, stereotypes of groups, which are not hegemonically powerful, can be formulated, destroyed, or reaffirmed through media portrayals (Dates, 1980). This manipulation of stereotypes is a process by which the ideologically dominant groups (mostly white, middle class and male; Foster, 2004) legitimate and promote their own cultural authority (van Dijk, 1993a). These gatekeepers use portrayals of the differences of minority groups as a legitimation to dominate or marginalise others’ (van Dijk, 1997, p.144). Certain discriminative notions of ‘race’ are perpetuated
through reports about migration and minority ethnic groups (Campbell, 1995; Meyers, 1997; van Dijk, 1991; Law, 2002). Today, overt racism has become a socially unacceptable discourse to adopt (Augoustinos, Tuffin & Every, 2005); especially within the arena of media production. The introduction of the Race Relations Act 1976 meant that all explicitly discriminative content was to disappear from the mass media; causing some to conclude that racism was not ‘endorsed’ through media channels (McNair, 1998). However, Barker (1981, 1990) argued that the socially and legislatively conceded disapproval of overt racism lead to the development of a more subtle means of producing discriminative material; known as ‘new racism’. Racism evolved to become focused on the cultural differences between groups, rather than being explicitly based on racial differences (Barker, 1981). Whilst Barker’s ideas were vulnerable to critique, the term ‘new racism’ is still referred to within deconstructive social scientific literature.

Research has suggested that social groups are represented in the mass media in a variety of manners. Cottle (1993) illustrates how regional television programmes in the UK often represented ethnic minorities in ‘multiculturalist’ fashions, focusing on ‘cultural festivals, individual success stories and the cultural exotica of ethnic minority cultures’ (Cottle, 2000; p.11). This simultaneously creates the minority group ‘other’ whilst alienating it from the majority group. Saeed (2007) suggests that the British media utilises ‘otherness’ to produce racist misrepresentations of ‘the other’; such as Islamophobia. Meeto and Mirza (2007) suggest that media representations of the ‘other’ often regard the ‘threat that multi-cultural policies pose to core values, cultural homogeneity and social cohesion’ (p.194). It would seem that upon observation, the media has created a stereotypical (mis)representation for almost every social group around today. Saeed (2007) suggests from otherness develops the themes of ‘deviance’ and ‘un-Britishness’. Fekete (2004) suggests stereotyping of other cultures as backward creates a climate in which politicians and the media can attack multiculturalism’ (p.19). It seems paradoxical that this focus on difference is so prevalent when ‘half of Britain’s ethnic minorities are British born, no longer immigrants but Britons’ (Littlewood & Lipsedge, 1993). These discursive themes of ‘otherness’ and cultural dualism appear to combine when we observe that in recent years the media’s targeted ‘folk devil’ (Cohen, 1972) has shifted from those of the British Afro-Caribbean youth to the British Asian youth (Alexander, 2000; Salgado-Pottier, 2008; Modood et al., 1997; Poynting et al., 2004). Media gaze has shifted from its creation of the ‘black teen mugger’ (Alexander, 1996) to its stereotypical portrayal of the ‘Asian gang member’ (Alexander, 2000).

The media also places emphasis on otherness within ‘racial’ categories. Morosanu (2007) suggests that media representations of Eastern Europeans portray a migratory group ‘dominated by low-skilled, often undocumented, labour migrants, human trafficking and “bogus” refugees’ (p.3). She continues to say that notions of Eastern European (especially Polish) migration are framed within the media as invasions and floods; focused on ‘crime, prostitution and illegal migration’ (p.7); and Eastern Europeans are represented within Western media as the ‘other Europeans’ (Morosanu, 2007; Hudabiuniigg, 2004). Whilst stereotypical media representations of almost every ethnic group are reported, even if condensed the body of literature would be enormous. This representation of those who differ from the dominant social group norm as ‘others’ is a constantly recurring theme throughout research exploring
the subject (Teo, 2000; Morosanu, 2007; Saeed, 2007; Caldas-Coulthard, 2003; Hallam & Street, 2000; Hudabiunigg, 2004).

Research suggests that minority ethnic groups are not only victimised by how they are represented within newspaper articles, but also by the structural devices and semiotic tools employed within the articles by the journalists and newspaper editorial staff (van Dijk, 1986; 1993a; 2000). Van Dijk (1986) suggested that ‘even in ethnic news, minorities are quoted less, and less prominently than (white) elites’ (1986, p. 214). The quotes which are selected will often confirm the ‘general attitudes about the group in question (2000, p.39)'; and that minority group ‘actors’ may have a larger role to play within articles they will often be less quoted than ‘institutional/ elite’ actors. He also suggests ‘minority group representatives will seldom be allowed to speak alone’ (2000, p.39).

Van Dijk (2000) also suggests that the news events, which portray ethnic minorities, are often limited in content to a handful of topics. These are topics regarding the population’s response to ethnic minorities and migration; problems of migrant ‘reception’; a focus on deviance threats linked to minority groups (e.g. crime); the conflicts preventing group integration; political reactions regarding immigration policies (and opposition to these); the arrival of new individuals; and articles regarding both cultural (the difference between majority and minority groups) and negative (the deviance of ethnic groups) characterisations. Van Dijk continues to say stories regarding migrants leaving the country, ethnic minorities positively contributing to society, and racism encountered by these individuals are often absent from media. Work by Gardikiotis, Martin and Hewstone (2004) and Atuel, Seyranian and Crano (2009) also found a significant difference regarding the issues associated with the minority and majority groups. Content targeted at the majority groups is more concerned with ‘political issues’ whilst content targeted towards minority groups focuses on ‘social issues’ and ethnicity. This limiting of topics regarding minority ethnic groups is partially due to the deep-seated news values of preferential covering of ‘bad news stories’ (ter Wal, D’Haenens & Koeman, 2005), as well as the tendency for journalists to project their own world-view (inclusive of inherent prejudices) onto a story (Cottle, 2000). According to Van Dijk, all of these processes function to further misrepresent ethnic minorities within the media. This process inevitably works to benefit the white elites, and one would conclude that it was purposely structured to do so (Van Dijk, 2000).

Research context: Why the City of Manchester? Why the Manchester Evening News?

The City of Manchester is a complex and quintessentially diverse environment, home to an eclectic range of inhabitants. With a current estimated population of 483,800 and a population density of 41.8 persons per hectare (Manchester Factsheet, 2011), the City of Manchester environment is one of the most heavily populated in the north-west of England (Office of National Statistics, 2001). The ethnic stratification is as follows; White Groups 76.9%, Mixed Residents 3.2%, Black Residents 4.9%, Asian Residents 9.2%, Chinese Residents 2.5%, and Other Ethnic Group Residents 3.2% (Manchester Factsheet, 2011). Manchester’s economic empire was built on slavery (but is often ignorant of this; Kowaleski-Wallace, 2006) and the exploitation of workers (specifically foreign workers); from this developed a strong following
amongst the Mancunion population campaigning for abolition of the Slave Trade (Clarkson, 1808; Jennings, 1997). This research intended to explore the ways in which ethnic social groups are represented in a local Manchester newspaper, the Manchester Evening News. Approximately 148,000 copies of the MEN are distributed each day, six days a week (distribution halts on Sunday; Manchester Online, 2010) throughout the City of Manchester.

Objectives

This research intends to contribute new findings to the current body of knowledge regarding discursive media representations of socially marginalised groups (in this instance, ethnic groups). The objectives of this research will differ from those of quantitative research due to the tenets of the employed research methodology. Discursive research techniques are characterised by their cumulative nature (Potter, 1996), and the epistemological position of the research question is geared towards a social constructionist standpoint. Furthermore, reflexivity is essential to this research process and complete objectifying separation from research matter is often impossible (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Therefore, in this instance the adoption of a hypothetico-deductive approach would not be appropriate (Hayes, 2000; Willig, 2001). Instead, this project will aim to unfold the concept of representations of ethnicity in an exploratory manner. This report will contribute to the minimal body of research regarding minority group portrayals through regional news outlets, as the majority of previous research has focused on national news outlets (Poindexter, Smith & Heider, 2003).

Considering methodology

The conceptually intricate natures of the phenomena explored within this study meant that quantitative research methods were discarded in favour of subjective, exploratory methods. The adoption of a qualitative methodology (critical discourse analysis; CDA) was beneficial to the fluidity of the study in a way, which empirical methods may not have been. When considering the foundations of empirical science, the critiques of using quantitative methodology in circumstances similar to this one become more apparent. Morrow (1994) reduced the principles of positivist empiricism to three basic premises; the concept of universality regarding application of findings, the emphasis on observation of neutrally observable facts, and that the facts acquired within ‘advanced sciences provide the basis for the unity of science’ (p.66). When considering this definition it is apparent that a quantitative approach was inappropriate for this study. The Manchester Evening News was collected for 3 months and submitted to analysis; the approach, which was adopted, required ‘naturally occurring texts’ (Barker & Galasiński, 2001). This served to help minimise any ideological influence of the researcher (Langdridge, 2004).

Method of analysis: Critical discourse analysis

Discourse analysis can be described as being ‘concerned with the ways in which language constructs objects, subjects, and experiences, including subjectivity and a sense of self’ (Willig, 1999, p.2); and as the ‘analysis of any...forms of discourse’ (Potter & Wetherell, 1987). Parker (1992) suggests ‘constructed objects’ become
real through interpersonal interactions, whilst Talbot (2007) offers a definition of discourse by contrasting it with the meaning of ‘text’;

‘We can use the term text to mean the observable product of interaction: cultural objects; and discourse to mean the process of interaction itself: a cultural activity’. (p.9)

Talbot continues to state that text is integral to the discursive process, and to study it in a segregated manner would be counterintuitive. He believes to analyse discourse we must observe the situational and political context in which the text came to fruition, by examining the link between the text and the context.

According to Wood and Kroger (2000), it is possible to reflect on utterances in terms of their basic meaning, how they are utilised, and the effect they can have upon perception. This means a simple phrase not only acts to describe an experiential context, but also retains semantically loaded connotations, which can be intended to be received or interpreted in a specific manner (Wood & Kroger, 2000).

Critical discourse analysis (Van Dijk, 1993b; Fairclough, 1995; Teo, 2000; Machin & Mayr, 2007) is ‘characterized by the common interests in de-mystifying ideologies and power through the systematic and retroductable investigation of semiotic data (written, spoken or visual)’ (Wodak & Meyer, 2001, p.3). Kincheloe and McLaren (2002) describe critical theory as ‘concerned in particular with issues of power and justice and the ways that the economy; matters of race, class, and gender; ideologies; discourses; education; religion and other social institutions; and cultural dynamics interact to construct a social system (p.90)’. According to Teo (2000), critical discourse analysis functions as a methodology to go beyond the identifying and explaining of discourses, aiming to explain how these ideological discourses are produced in the first place. Teo continues to say that in regards to the contrast with the descriptive nature of traditional discourse analysis;

‘CDA…moves from this surface attentiveness to recognition of the crucial role played by deeper, larger social forces which exist in a dialectical relationship with the discourse: discourse both shapes and is shaped by society’. (Teo, 2000, p.12)

Critical discourse analysis not only examines the socially constructivist nature of discourse, but also how discourses reproduces dynamics of power and notions of inequality (Ainsworth, 2001; Fairclough, 1995; Fairclough & Wodak, 1997). Due to these tenets, critical discourse analysis seems appropriate to use to examine racialised content within newspaper publication (Machin & Mayr, 2007; Teo, 2000). Fairclough and Wodak (1997) summarise the fundamental principles of critical discourse analysis as a discipline that explores societal problems; one, which examines the link that exists between society and text, and a discipline, that interprets as well as explains. They continue to say that critical discourse analysis makes assumptions of discourse. These assumptions are that discourse exists within a historical context; that is exerts significant ideological inclinations; that discourse exists as a subcomponent of culture and society; that discourses act as the vehicle by which power relations often reveal themselves; and that discourse is
produced by individuals and injected into society. This research was dependant on the fact that the data being analysed did not exist in a socio-political vacuum (Wood & Kroger, 2000), but was massively influenced by the opinions and attitudes of individuals producing the texts; as well as the ideological context in which the text was produced, and even the political climate in which it came into existence (Kellner, 1995).

**Procedure**

Today there exists almost as many frameworks for critically analysing discourse as there are academics studying it. The extent to which the researcher adapts the malleable discipline to their own way of working means there is a huge body of academic literature regarding how CDA should be undertaken. This study loosely adopted the first three stages of Fairclough's (2001) five-stage analytical framework. The first step required not to begin with a research question, but to focus on a social problem; as the intention of CDA is to promote social change. The next step required 'identifying obstacles of the social problem being tackled' (p.236). Fairclough suggests this is achieved by analysing the context in which the social problem lies.

At the third stage, the link between the implicit meanings of the text and 'other elements within the particular practices concerned' is examined (Fairclough, 2001, p.236). This stage is described by Fairclough (2001) as 'interactional analysis'. He describes this as the analysis of 'conversations, interviews, written texts, television programmes and other forms of semiotic activity' (2001, p.238). This means that even texts such as newspaper articles should be interpreted in terms of 'interaction' between the producers of the text and those the text is aimed at. Interactional analysis includes using structural analysis (the way the discourse is ordered), semiotic and linguistic analysis (the structure of words used, and the meaning implied by these words), and interdiscursive analysis (the interaction between evident discourses). All were applied at this stage to help develop an understanding of the cause of the problem. The discussion regarding the articles was integrated into the analysis as to separate the two would cause the writing to appear disjointed.

**Text collection**

A set of articles printed in the Manchester Evening News were analysed. The study involved taking a sample of articles from the MEN over a three-month period (30 September 2010-31 December 2010). Articles regarding ethnicity (and similar concepts i.e. culture/ multiculturalism) were extracted; 82 articles in all. This set was then refined to a set of three articles for analysis; the selection of which were made by the researcher as to not be explicitly sensationalist. The nature of qualitative research means that this sample was not representative of the entire sample set, however I exercised my discretion as a research to ensure this fact was reflexively considered. Critical discourse analysis (van Dijk, 1986; Fairclough, 1995; Chouliaraki & Fairclough, 1999; Barker & Galasiński, 2001) was adopted to analyse the texts.
Ethical Issues

Psychological research must adhere to a strict ethical code of conduct, as determined by the British Psychological Society (if practicing within the UK; The British Psychological Society, 2009). Manchester Metropolitan University requires accordance to guidelines to ensure conducted research meets predetermined ethical standards; this approval had been attained. I must also consider that my dissection and discussion of racialised text will in itself produce racialised texts; sometimes ‘the line separating racism from antiracism is sometimes so unclear that the sets of discursive practices converge’ (Harrison, 1995).

Analysis and discussion

Alert as 6,000 Poles expected for Euro clash at Eastlands

This article (Keegan, 2010) details the influx of Polish football supporters expected to attend a football match in the Manchester area; and the police’s prediction of inevitable football hooliganism between the native Poles and expatriate Poles. The article is preceded by the headline mentioned above. Below this headlines appears two subtitles; ‘300 police officers will be on duty for match’, and ‘Blues to separate two sets of away supporters’. This implies that the Mancunian football supporters in question will be required to act as a buffer between the two Polish contingencies, which should both be considered ‘threatening’. The text begins with the phrase ‘more than 300 police officers will be on duty as Manchester braces itself’, implying that the police are employing a higher level of organisation than is usually required. The semiotic structure of the article seems to place the police (an organisation perceived to support dominant group ideology; Lambert, 1970) as a symbolic ‘line of defence’ against the Polish fans. Furthermore, the use of the word ‘brace’ implies that the native inhabitants of Manchester should become aware of forthcoming ‘invasion’ of Polish football hooligans. Throughout the article the writer does not suggest that any proportion of the expected Polish attendees may be there in support of the English football team (despite the fact that in 2007 around 8% of all Polish people residing in the UK were located in the North West; ONS, 2009). Furthermore, the article refers to ‘Poles based in Britain’, rather than Polish people living in Britain. The lack of transitivity (Fairclough, 2001) in this phrase furthers these individuals from ‘Britishness’.

The second subtitle details the precautions taken to separate the two ‘legions’ of Polish football fans. Words such as ‘flock’ and ‘invasion’ are used to describe the expected influx of 6,000 Polish fans, while the article later states that only half of this number is expected from outside Britain. There is also a strong discursive theme regarding football hooliganism throughout the article. The presupposed violence is attributed entirely to the Polish fans (‘Polish clubs are notorious for rioting’) rather than British fans. However, the article continues to state that there was ‘no intelligence’ to suggest violence would be due to Polish supporters, or would even occur. This seems obscure as the ‘idea of football hooliganism’ has traditionally been, and is often currently framed ‘as an English disease’ (Dunning, 2000). The only quotation utilised is one of Superintendent Craig Thompson, regarding the intentions of the police to quash any violent or anti-social behaviour. The image, which is inset, is of the Manchester City football ground, imposing and fort-like,
captioned with the phrase ‘big game: Security will be tight at City’s Eastlands stadium’. This image seems to either present the idea of a place for forthcoming ‘battle’, or a monument to be protected from the ‘flock’ of Polish fans.

This portrayal of the Polish football fans flocking towards Britain en masse seems to mirror the discursive representations of Eastern Europeans as an ethnic group frequently found in the media, as suggested by Morosanu (2007). The tone of concern throughout the article (‘alert’, ‘league clash’, ‘unprecedented numbers of officers’) all seem to reflect the manner in which previous research has suggested Eastern Europeans are framed within the context of ‘invasions and floods’. ‘Political and media dialogue in the West have abounded in “flooding” or “swamping” metaphors with respect to Eastern European newcomers’ (Morosanu, 2007, p.6). It seems that the journalists use of semiotics and descriptive language (regarding influx) appears to act as a metaphor for the migrational influx experienced by Britain after opening its economic borders to migrant workers from newer EU countries in an attempt to stimulate the economy (see Portes & French, 2005). This lead to a significant increase of migrant workers relocating to the UK (as this was actually encouraged by British legislation), 60% of these being Polish of origin (Drew & Sriskandarajan, 2006); this was met by an uproar from British media outlets regarding the ‘relentless advances’ of Polish migrant workers in Britain (see Slack, 2006; 2007). Due to their sensationalism (as is often preferred by media gatekeepers; ter Wal, D’Haenens & Koeman, 2005), articles like this outweigh others which realistically portray the correct influx, as well as the efflux, of Polish migrants to and from Britain (see Travis, 2010). This notion supports van Dijk’s (2000) suggestion that news regarding migrants leaving Britain is rarely seen in media portrayals. In addition, the portion of the article geared towards the minority group concerns social issues, whilst the majority group is informed of political issues regarding migration; supporting the work of Atuel, Seyranian and Crano (2009).

The item does appear to construct the Polish agents as ‘others’; a collective which is distanced from the majority peoples, and intent on destructive behaviour. These perceptions align somewhat with certain facets of Spillman and Spillman’s (1997) model of enemy construction; the actions of the ‘other’ group are perceived as a threat to the ideologically dominant group, and that anyone who belongs to the imposing group becomes labelled with values opposing to those of the dominant group. Furthermore, the construction of the idea that these Eastern Europeans are EU nationals welcomed through legislation but still treated by media perception as invading European ‘others’ supports the work of Morosanu (2007) and Hudabiunigg (2004).

**Party time as city gets ready to celebrate Eid**

This 250-word article (Brooks-Pollock, 2010) is initially presented in a way, which celebrates the Muslim celebration of Eid; however, the language of the piece is riddled with references to the ‘inevitability’ of trouble making, anti-social behaviour and crime. The headline reads as above; which is followed by the subtitles ‘thousands heading here for Muslim festival’, and ‘police chiefs’ warning for troublemakers’. The headline appears to display the publications embracing of the festival (and as such, multiculturalism), however the subtitles seem to suggest that the authorities presume anti-social behaviour is inevitable. The article describes how
the Greater Manchester Police had ‘been working with Manchester’s Muslim community’ to minimise the occurrence of trouble; as too have three other council associations. Throughout the article, six references to the police are made. I believe this can be interpreted as either a hearty emphasis on festival safety, or an overzealous attempt to assert the dominance of the police within the organisation of the festival. The image inset to the piece displays a chaotic scene, laced with police officers, pedestrians, and cars. It is interesting that the author surrounds the description of Eid with quote marks (‘throughout the ‘Festival of Sacrifice’”) which seems to portray it as culturally ‘different’. The reader is also told that ‘a police operation will run throughout’ Eid, ‘with officers patrolling...the surrounding area to respond to reports of crime, anti-social behaviour, and public disorder’. The presentation of this fact proposes to the reader that an overt police presence is necessary to prevent misdemeanours. This seems to disempower the Muslim community, whom the festival serves, as they are in ‘need of protection’ from the police force due to their own doing. This process of victim blaming is a method of ‘new racism’ utilised by the media to perpetuate social inequality (Teo, 2000).

The only quote is from Chief Inspector Neil Bholé. This is regarding the Police’s perception of Eid as an important Muslim festival, that Manchester is proud to be host to this and that ‘if anyone is intent on causing problems for the local community, then please stay away’. It is interesting that despite three other organisational bodies being mentioned throughout the text no quotes are taken from them. Inset into the main body of text is a quote from the Chief Inspector; it reads ‘we are extremely proud that Rusholme [where the event is to take place] is a focal point for Muslim communities’. The semiotic structures of the quote all create a feeling of separation between the local Muslim community and the Greater Manchester Police (which represent the ideologically dominant; Lambert, 1970). Whilst undoubtedly a police presence will be beneficial to all, the focus on the police activity within the article is overbearing and frames the celebration within a context, which suggests it needs to be controlled. Throughout the article, six references to the police are made. This does display, as suggested by van Dijk (2000), that despite the fact that ethnic minority group ‘actors’ may have a larger role to play within articles they will often be less quoted than ‘institutional/ elite’ actors.

The article borders between portraying Eid as a celebration of importance to Muslim culture, and as an opportunity for public disorder. It is interesting to contrast this article with another in the same issue (‘Under my umbrella’, Manchester Evening News; 16/11/2010, p.16) which examines another cultural activity, but in a far more relaxed manner. The article details an event in Manchester centred on a group performing traditional Taiwanese dances, portraying it as quaint ‘exotica’. This seems to align with the documented preference of journalists to portray the ‘oriental’ woman as ‘the docile doll/ Lotus blossom’ (Uchida, 1998). Despite the differences in portraying cultures in these items (deviant versus exotic), both articles portray ideas of cultural ‘otherness’.

One has to consider the reasons as to why these semantically loaded portrayals of British Muslims persist; the ‘deviant’ portrayals within the article align with the conclusions of Saeed (2007) regarding Islamophobic media representations. This seems to be in support of the suggestions by Fairclough (2001); the newspaper industry appeals to its larger audience share (the Asian and Asian British population
only making up 4.0% of the total UK population; ONS, 2004) to maintain popularity amongst the majority. Furthermore, the article appears to create the Manchester Muslim community as an ‘other’, with cultural norms and values that oppose those of the British people, an as such are ‘un-British’.

**Police probe ‘race hate campaign’ against Muslim Euro MP**

This article (Linton, 2010) regards the experiences of Sajjad Karim (a ‘Muslim, Tory politician’) as the alleged victim of a ‘race hate campaign by far right activists’; and the police inquiry as to determine whether this did take place. The article begins with the aforementioned headline. The accentuation applied to the phrase ‘race hate campaign’ immediately frames the story as containing fictitious elements. Furthermore, the reference to the beliefs of the MP (‘Muslim Euro MP’) creates a divide between the minority group actor, and the (presumed) majority group reader; the ‘other’ is immediately defined. The article begins by describing how police began investigating ‘claims by North West MEP…that he has been the target of a race hate campaign by far right activists’; the use of the word ‘claims’ again infers the presence of fictional elements. It is also interesting to note how the term ‘far right activists’ is utilised, rather than ‘racists’ (referring to the BNP, a political party renowned for its internalised racism; Ray & Smith, 2001). As van Dijk (2000) suggests, journalists will utilise different local meanings to refer to the same thing dependant on the ideology they wish to transmit (Western media will reference ‘terrorists’ as opposed to ‘freedom fighters’; p.39).

The reader is told that the campaign began after a story on the British National Party (BNP) website detailed how Mr Karim voted against a regulation ‘on the compulsory labelling of Halal and Kosher meat’. The article then describes how a representative of the MEN had witnessed the messages first hand; the description of these is gratuitous (one has to question whether slander concerning other groups would be presented in a similarly detailed manner), and contradictory to the previous assertions that claims of ‘bullying’ may be fictitious (both by the author and the police).

Through the article quotes are taken from three different actors; Mr Karim, a representative of Greater Manchester Police force, and a BNP representative. Karim is quoted first around halfway through the piece, describing how he received emails, which were ‘intimidating, threatening and insulting, and abusive’. The second quote from the police representative states that complaints regarding emails containing abuse were made. The words of the representative are very formal, displaying no sympathy for Karim, or any defamation of racist behaviour. The third quotation is taken from a representative of the BNP who suggests that the racism experienced by Karim is in response to his involvement in the EU regulation process regarding Halal and Kosher meat. At no point does the spokesperson state that racism is wrong or that it is an inappropriate response to Karim’s EU activity. The representative makes a culturally antagonistic remark without censorship (‘Halal barbarism’), and then tries to accuse Mr Karim of trying to ‘stir up trouble and slur our party [the BNP]’. It seems the publication allows interdiscursive victimisation by hiding behind the assertion that these are not the words of MEN representatives. The journalist and the police representative project no moral judgment onto the story. This failure of key actors to denounce racism normalises this discourse, making it ‘acceptable’ and devoid of
consequence. Furthermore, the BNP spokesperson uses British cultural norms (such as the regard for animal rights) to portray the religious ‘other’ as nurturing of values which differ to those held by the ideologically dominant group. This serves to create an ‘un-British other’ (Saeed, 2007), and despite its racialised content the quote remains in its entirety.

Despite the fact that the article at first appears to sympathise with Mr Karim, further examination seems to suggest this is not the case. Little disapproval is made of the direct racism by the representative actors. The article seems to subversively attack multiculturalism by its brazen presentation of discriminative discourse and its failure to overtly disagree with the racist attitudes displayed by the BNP activists.

Conclusions

As the mass media are supposed to be unbiased, and overt discrimination is deemed unacceptable, we should expect portrayals not to be semantically loaded. It is interesting to note that out of the original sample set of 82 articles, 17 referred to Islamic extremism, 14 referred to illegal immigration and failed asylum seeking, the five articles regarding Eastern Europeans all framed them in a negative or criminal light, and only four articles appeared to support multiculturalism. This limitation to ways in which the MEN represents ethnic minority groups supports previous research (van Dijk, 2000; Gardikiotis, Martin & Hewstone, 2004). The topics associated to minority ethnic groups can socialise those with limited experience of minority groups into associating stereotypical norms to them (ter Wal, D’Haenens & Koeman, 2005).

In accordance with the conclusions of the discussed literature, the articles dissected throughout this study have all displayed how the media creates the ‘other’. As van Dijk (1993a, 2000) suggests the media manipulates the majority readership’s perceptions of the ‘other’, as this protects the position of the ideologically dominant group. Whether portraying Poles in Britain as an ‘invasion’, or presenting Muslim cultural practice as ‘un-British’, the text producer simultaneously associates the reader with their own group, and portrays the ‘other’ as threatening to the dominant group’s values and safety. The articles all identify the actors as belonging to a minority group, which immediately disassociates them from the assumed reader’s group. This allows the writers to examine how these groups differ from their own, and pose a threat to their values and norms; this focus on difference allows the media to covertly attack multiculturalism (Fekete, 2004). An important conclusion of this research to note is the discursive practice of using news stories as metaphor for underlying social prejudices of the media industry. This study also contributes findings to the small body of research regarding regional news distribution.

Certain aspects of this study will have suffered from limitations. The sample was small; this was due to time and word restrictions. A future study may benefit from a far larger research sample covering a wider variety of topics; such as gender, socio-economy, and sexuality. This was the original intention of the study; however, this was again altered due to time limitations. We must also consider that despite my efforts to exclusively dissect notions of ethnicity, social characteristics as well as different forms of social oppression are often intertwined (Foster, 2004), and as such important influencing factors may have been neglected. It is also important to
understand that whilst CDA may have been the most suitable method for analysing discourse within a critical perspective, it still maintains methodological problems. Discursive analytic approaches pose the problem that under-analysis can occur through the researcher ‘taking sides’, and focusing too heavily on ‘simply spotting features’ of the texts (Antaki et al., 2003). Critical discourse analysis was utilised to alleviate issues regarding the latter issue, as links between the texts and wider society are thoroughly considered. However, my political positioning will have had a distinct effect on the research; this is unavoidable. My academic preferences are for critical and community psychology and I personally believe every social group deserves to be fairly portrayed within an unbiased media context. Manchester is where I reside and have done for 3 years; I am a White British, third year undergraduate Psychology student with an interest in multiculturalism. This notion of reflexivity is essential to the research process, as complete objectifying separation from research matter is often impossible (Nightingale & Cromby, 1999). Critical discourse analysis was an appropriate method to extract the findings of this study; however, an interdisciplinary approach may have added more depth to them.

When considering the implications that this research may have, we must note that whilst it may be easy to change legislation, it is far more difficult to alter opinions, attitudes and social hierarchies. Understanding that ideologically dominant groups manipulate the output of the press means that research must explore why this is a discursive norm. Further research could examine the reader’s phenomenological interpretations of these representations. Most research (including this piece) assumes the reader’s passivity as an agent of discourse, however the public can often have an effect on the media (Hacking, 1999). The conclusions may help publications reach the government appraised ‘gold standard’ of ethnicity representation (see Machin & Mayr, 2007), and minimise the effect of perpetuated social inequality.

Whilst contemporary society appears to discourage discrimination, it would seem it is deeply interwoven into the fabric of the mass media. The discursive practices discussed throughout this study appear to demonstrate the manifestation of deep-rooted social ignorance. We must consider whether it is a adequate to strive for a change of these practices, or whether it is more important to focus on deconstructing the current ideological conflicts between the media producers and minority groups.

References


