



## 6. WORLDS APART: PERCEPTIONS OF THE BLACK COMMUNITY

### Overview

This chapter addresses how BEP participants view the Black community, as well as their views about how the Black community is perceived by non-Black people in the GTA.

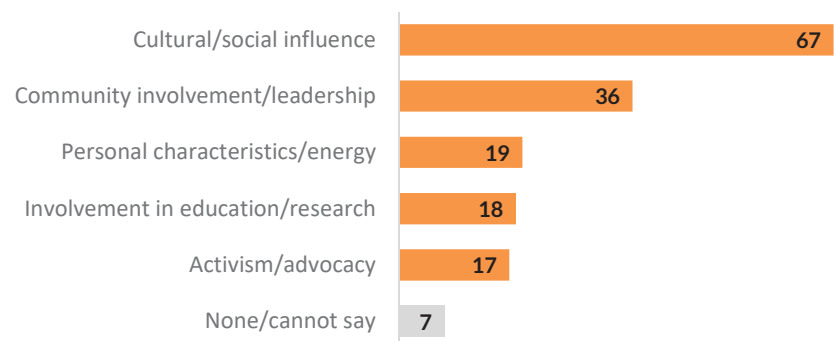
The survey asked BEP participants what they think makes the Black community in the GTA unique or distinct, to identify its greatest strengths and the contributions it makes to the GTA, and to say what gives them confidence about the community's ability to achieve its goals. The research did not gauge directly how non-Black people in the GTA view their Black counterparts, but rather asked participants about how they believe they are perceived by the broader society around them. This included asking whether they think non-Black people's impressions of Black people are positive or negative, how these may have changed over the past decade, and what they believe to be the most commonly held beliefs about Black people. Given the importance of the mainstream media in shaping beliefs and attitudes, BEP participants were asked to evaluate media portrayals of Black people in terms of the amount and the accuracy of the coverage that Black people receive.

Taken together, the results show that the qualities that BEP participants associate with the Black community -- qualities relating to the community's culture, diversity and heritage of the Black community, as well as the strength and perseverance of community members -- are strikingly different from the negative qualities that they believe others in the GTA associate with their community.

### Key Findings

As reported in Chapter 3, BEP participants take great pride in the strength, resilience and achievement of the Black community. There is widespread agreement that the Black community has had important cultural or social influence in making the GTA a better place to live. Another main theme to emerge from participants' reflections on the uniqueness and strengths of the Black community is that of perseverance, hard work and the ability to meet challenges and overcome adversity (see Figure 36).

(36) Black community's most important contributions to the GTA



**(37) Basis of hope and confidence in achieving community goals**

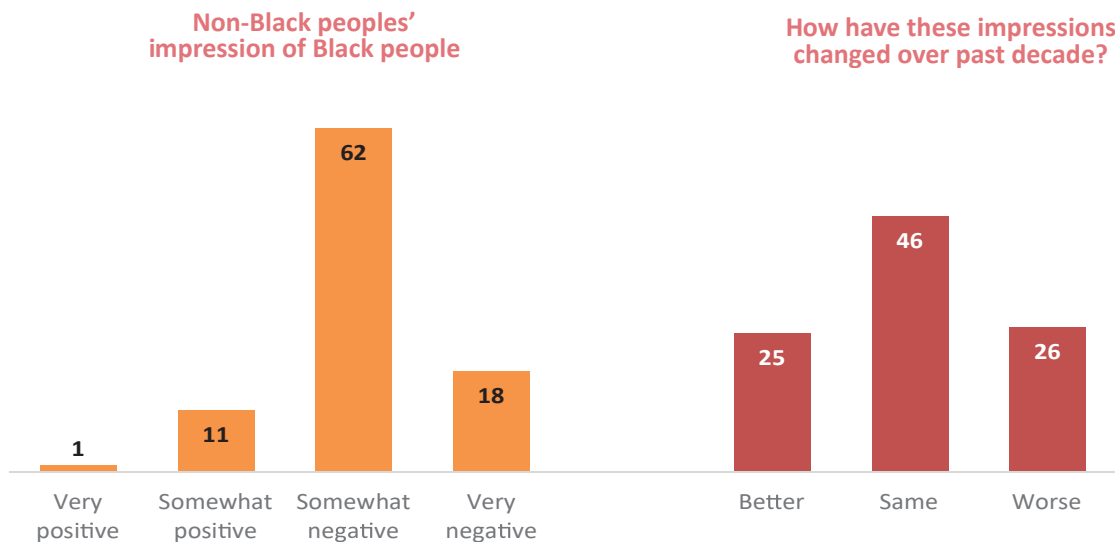


And BEP participants are most likely to ground their hopes and confidence in the community’s ability to achieve these goals in its determination, optimism and strength. Along with perseverance, many also mention solidarity (the sense of community and the support the community provides to its members) as one of the Black community’s greatest strengths in the GTA (see Figure 37).

In stark contrast to the positive attributes that BEP participants associate with the Black community, most – four in five – believe that non-Black people in the GTA hold negative impressions of them as Black people. And relatively few – only one in four – say these impressions have gotten better over the past ten years (see Figure 38).

When asked what they believe are the most common beliefs that non-Black people hold about Black people, all of the examples cited are negative ones. Three in four participants mention beliefs relating to criminal behaviour, violence, gangs or drugs. More than one in two mentions the belief that Blacks are uneducated and inferior, and a similar proportion identify the belief that Black people are lazy and lack ambition. The two most frequently mentioned answers by younger participants were the belief that Blacks are involved in crime, violence, gangs, or drugs, and that they are uneducated or unintelligent. This suggests that these are the most pervasive beliefs about Black people that Black youth confront today.

**(38) How non-Black people in the GTA view Black people**

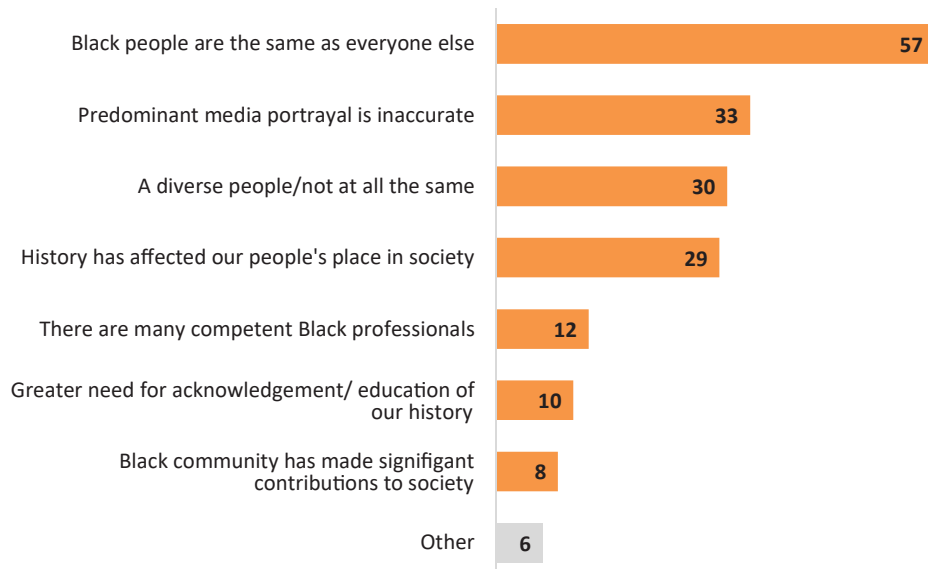




These stereotypes are the same ones that BEP participants see perpetuated by the mainstream media. Most (two in three) participants say there is too little portrayal of Black people or groups in the mainstream media, whether it is newspapers (66%), radio (66%) or television (63%), with most of the existing portrayals being predominantly negative.

When asked what they most wished the broader society understood about Black people, BEP participants say they are like everyone else, that the media portrayal is inaccurate, that they are a diverse community, and how the historical legacy of racism and discrimination has contributed to the challenges they currently face (see Figure 39).

### (39) What broader society should understand about Black people



Participants were also asked about the ways in which Black people are portrayed accurately and inaccurately in the media they see. When asked specifically about the ways in which Black people are portrayed accurately, the most common response is the insistence that Black people are not in fact portrayed accurately in the media – 25 percent of participants take this view (see Figure 40).

The accurate portrayals that are mentioned include coverage of live events in the arts, entertainment or sports, in some programs or types of reporting (e.g., on certain TV shows, news programs or documentaries, or when Black people are involved in production). Less commonly mentioned are accurate portrayals of Black as leaders or individual success stories, or portrayals of cultural or historical events such as Black History Month events and Caribbean festivals.

There is comparatively more agreement among participants about the ways in which Black people are portrayed inaccurately. One in two says that Black people are portrayed inaccurately in terms of an exaggerated extent of their involvement in criminal activities or drugs. About one in four points to inaccurate portrayals of Black people as uneducated, lazy, lacking ambition or dependent on welfare. Others cite portrayals that rely on general stereotypes and misrepresentations, such as those that emphasize aspects of Black communities or depict Black people solely as athletes and entertainers.

**What do you think makes the Black community unique or distinctive from the many diverse groups that make up the Greater Toronto Area?**

*I think the heterogeneous nature of the community. Also that it is distinguished by colour, no other community is labeled like that. Shared history, legacy connects us. No other community is labeled by the skin colour and lumped into one. This is probably based on our shared history. Europeans named us and we reclaimed that. This has really set us apart, showcases our resilience.*



(40) Portrayal of Black people in the media

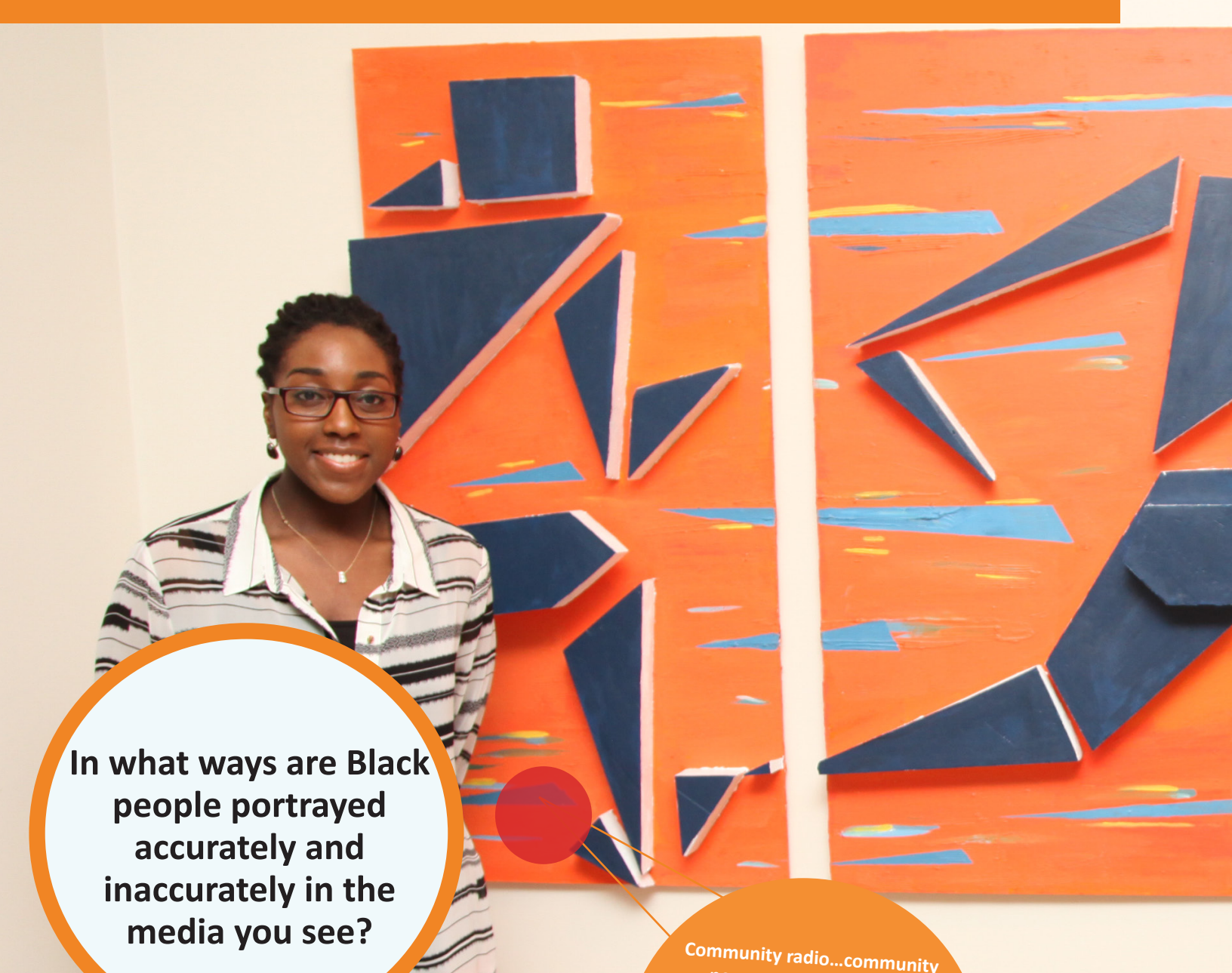
In what ways are Black people portrayed accurately in the media you see?	%	In what ways are Black people portrayed inaccurately in the media you see?	%
Not in fact portrayed accurately	25	Exaggeration of criminal activities	50
Live events (arts, entertainment and sports)	21	Uneducated, lazy or lack of ambition	27
TV, radio, web (e.g., specific TV shows, documentaries)	17	Stereotypes or general misrepresentation	26
Portrayals of leaders or individual success stories	8	Negative character attributes (e.g., loud, confrontational, hypersexual)	21
Positive individual traits/efforts	6	Caricatures on TV or in movies	19
Cultural or historic events	4	Negative portrayal of families and family relationships	11
Portrayals of community engagement or activism	4	Negative or monolithic portrayal of Black community or Black youth	9
Positive portrayal of family life	2	Misrepresentation of Black culture	7
Don't know/no answer	33	Don't know/no answer	24



The diversity in our community. We have such a rich cultural expression from all African and Caribbean communities. All these communities have a vibrancy they bring from where they come from. The musical expression, the dancing. It's like an invisible web that connects us even though we're from different countries.

Our culture has amazing energy. We are in my opinion the funniest, most good-looking, most passionate, most resilient, most intelligent, most innovative, most fashion-savvy, most musical, more rhythmic, more persecuted group in the GTA.

I think as Black people we always say we will help each other but then do the opposite and it comes a competition...our pride gets in the way and we don't ask for help...we only come together when something negative happens...we come together when something negative happens.



**In what ways are Black people portrayed accurately and inaccurately in the media you see?**

When they are successful, such as when they win a competition or award, although we tend to be tokenized in those instances to misrepresent the successes within the black community.

Community radio...community newspaper...the ways in which Black people are making contribution in their community. The history of political or social experience. In telling their stories of current black people today.

We're either white-washed or gangster affiliates.



GISELLE TYRRELL  
Forward Thinking

We are either portrayed as the lowest of people or as extreme over-achievers who have distanced themselves from 'perceived Blackness'. We are often portrayed as over sexualized, violent, lawless, immoral people with no integrity or honesty. Any crime committed by a Black person receives an undue amount of media coverage focusing on dehumanizing the perpetrator. While Black victims are often cast in a negative light, with reports often insinuating that the victim was largely responsible for their problem. We are not seen as innocent or weak. We are portrayed as always guilty.

Just simply the storytelling. Various dominant ideals restrict portrayals of black peoples in media. Characters are restricted to limited narration and lack complexity. Blacks are represented one dimensionally as very gendered, able-bodied peoples in specific roles. With Blacks having certain dialects that require translation (though its English). Media makes it appear that there is a lack of complexity in Black peoples and their experiences. The perspective is not inclusive.