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Unveiling the implicit message: A look at racial, Hispanic/Latino, and Mexican portrayals on "Sesame Street"

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UNVEILING THE IMPLICIT MESSAGE: A LOOK AT RACIAL,
HISPANIC/LATINO, AND MEXICAN PORTRAYALS
ON *SESAME STREET*

by

Magdalena María Zepeda

Bachelor of Arts
University of Notre Dame, Notre Dame, IN
2000

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment
of the requirements for the

Master of Arts Degree
Hank Greenspun Department of Communication
Greenspun College of Urban Affairs

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Unveiling the Implicit Message: A Look at Racial, Hispanic/Latino,
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Master of Arts in Communication Studies

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ABSTRACT

Unveiling the Implicit Message: A Look at Racial, Hispanic/Latino and Mexican Portrayals on *Sesame Street*

by

Magdalena María Zepeda

**Dr. Dolores V. Tanno, Examination Committee Member
Professor of Communication
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In this master's thesis I analyzed *Sesame Street*, a well-known and popular model for many children's educational television programs as well as a racially sensitive show, by way of a content analysis. I documented all races represented by the people and human-looking, animated characters and puppets. Furthermore, my study proposed to look at the portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino group and Mexican group.

My findings revealed that the population on *Sesame Street* did not mirror the United States population distribution. Other results revealed the Hispanic/Latino group very rarely reflected their cultural customs, were mostly female and the majority was portrayed in lower class settings. Only eight characters of Mexican origin were portrayed and therefore the data outcomes had no extensive analysis. Yet, the resulting small number of Mexican characters supports the finding that *Sesame Street* seems to reduce the portrayal of Hispanics/Latinos to a very flat dimension.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

A chorus of children's voices fills the room. Some of the voices come from the television set, the others from three-to-five year olds sitting in front of it. Everyone is singing the alphabet song. Suddenly, the singing on the television stops. The voices in the room die out. There is silence. One of the television characters steps away from the group and while looking directly into the camera lens, asks a question. (It looks as if the character is really talking to the audience: the three-to-five year olds in the room). The viewers respond. Then, the characters resume their alphabet singing and the viewers join in. This is the typical image and pattern of a group of children watching a children's educational television show.

Background

Children's educational television is a segment within the television medium that has usually been portrayed as honest and as a provider of true images of the world through intellectually stimulating content (King, 2000). Since 1951, when it found its way into "popular vocabulary" (Steetle, 1959, p. 427) the concept of educational television has been of importance to society and researchers have argued that the educational lessons within such programming have proved to be beneficial for children

(Ball & Bogatz, 1970; Bogatz & Ball, 1971; Huston, Wright, Marquis, & Green, 1999; Wright & Huston, 1995).

“In the 1960’s and 1970’s, educational television flourished as shows such as *The Electric Company*, *Zoom*, and *3-2-1 Contact* joined the ranks, all continuing the new mission of entertaining children while helping them learn specific skills” (Cohen, 2001, p. 572). Currently, United States law requires that children’s educational programming be a part of all television broadcast stations. The policy began with the Children’s Television Act of 1990. The Act stated that broadcasters needed to show more educational programming, but when broadcasters did not step up to show “more” educational programming, the Clinton Administration took action. In 1996, it added a proposal mandating that at least three hours a week of “core” (Educational/Informational) programming be shown between the hours of 7:00 a.m. to 10:00 p.m.. The programs have to be at least 30 minutes in length and “further the educational and informational needs of children 16 years of age and under in any respect, including children’s intellectual/cognitive and social/emotional needs” (Federal Communications Commission, 1996, p.79).

Currently, educational children’s shows are full of educational value and/or skill-related plots. Some of these shows include *Sesame Street*, *Mister Rogers’ Neighborhood*, *Barney*, *Blues Clue’s*, and *Dora the Explorer*. Although the educational effects of these programs have been of wide interest to researchers, concepts such as the images presented in these shows, more specifically, the portrayals of underrepresented social groups, have rarely been investigated. Yet, on the other hand, the images or lack of images of underrepresented groups within general television programming are

constantly being studied and questioned (Allen & Clarke, 1980; Elasmr, Hasegawa & Brain, 1999; Greenberg & Collette, 1997; Greenberg & Heeter, 1983; Mastro & Greenberg, 2000; Oliver, 1994). Barner (1999) notes that educational programming is not probed or studied as frequently as entertainment television, because it seems that the “educational” label serves as “a “stamp of approval” . . . among the public” (Barner, 1999, p. 552). Thus, scrutiny is not necessarily instigated within this type of programming.

As mentioned above, children’s educational television programs are rarely studied and the studies that do exist focus mostly on the effects of the educational programs (Ball & Bogatz, 1970; Bogatz & Ball, 1971; Markle Foundation, 2000; Sesame Workshop, 2002). The shows are studied to see if children do or do not learn the lessons being taught. The research takes the form of either summative or formative research. “Formative research is in-progress research whereby segments are tested before being aired; the segments are then reformulated in response to the test results. Summative research involves postbroadcasting testing of the show’s effectivity” (Hendershot, 1999, p. 153).

Other children’s educational programming studies have acknowledged the Federal Communication Commission’s (FCC) mandates and other government-related issues toward such programming (Barner, 1999; Steetle, 1959; Steinberg, 1955). Characters or special effects within the programming have also been studied to try to understand how children react to or learn from certain images (Bryant, Brown, Parks, & Zillmann, 1983; Bryant, Hezel & Zillman, 1979; Campbell, Wright & Huston, 1987; Huston, Wright, Wartella, Rice, Watkins, Campbell & Potts, 1981; Wakshlag, Day, &

Zillman, 1981; Zillman, Williams, Bryant, Boynton & Wolf, 1980). In general, these analyses make up the greater part of the information within the field of children's educational television programming.

Language and gender have been apparent themes in a few earlier studies of children's educational television, but always as separate entities, never appearing within the same study. Language use patterns were analyzed in "Modeling Bilingualism on Television: Shaping the Linguistic Environment" (Blosser, 1986). This study was a first-time evaluation of language portrayals within educational programming whose goal was to teach the Spanish language. The researcher concluded that:

. . . some aspects of the language use patterns [in the children's programs] were perceived to be accurate while others were not. In distinguishing their own use of language from that employed on the show, informants commented on the use of more than one language in the same conversation, on code-switching, and on the nature of the Spanish (Blosser, 1986, p. 83).

Clearly, culture had an important role in Blosser's study, but the central aim of the work was focused on the portrayal of the Spanish language.

Another language study analyzed dialect. Rice and Haight (1986), analyzed grammar, content, and discourse within the shows, *Sesame Street* and *Mr. Rogers' Neighborhood*. Their findings "indicated that the dialogue of these programs [was] well suited to young viewers, with adjustments similar to those evident in adult's speech to young children" (1986, p. 282). The sample programs "emphasized and simplified

dialogues in a manner much like mothers: slow rate, low rate of dysfluencies, grammatical completeness . . . and avoidance of nonliteral word meanings” (p. 282).

A few studies of children’s educational programming have focused on social groups. These studies addressed gender, more specifically, gender role portrayals within educational programming. One of these investigations was Dohrmann’s 1975 study in which she consequently argued that, except for a study on the sexist content of *Sesame Street*, gender roles within educational programming had not been analyzed. Therefore, Dohrmann took two random samples from the educational shows: *Sesame Street*, the *Electric Company*, *Mr. Rogers’ Neighborhood* and *Captain Kangaroo*. She analyzed “gender-determined code in character[s] and [stereotypical] behavior roles” (p. 58) in each. Her findings showed that males usually portrayed leadership roles while females occupied more passive and dependent roles.

Years later, in 1999, Barner addressed gender role portrayals again in children’s educational programming. The difference between Dohrmann’s and Barner’s study is that Dohrmann’s choice of educational programming was not yet government mandated while Barner used educational programming that was FCC-mandated, 3-hour-a-week, “core” programming that stations are required to show. Barner found that, again, females were unequal to males in visibility, lead roles, and activity. One can conclude from these studies that the educational lessons coming from children’s educational programming may underscore dominant ideas not easily noticed by the casual viewer.

Purpose of the Study

After reviewing related studies, it became clear to me that certain types of studies within children's educational programming were unavailable. There was a gap between educational programming effects and gender role portrayal studies, for example. There was also much yet to be learned about the portrayals of racial groups and racial minority groups on children's educational television programming.

Race portrayals have been slightly addressed through the language studies mentioned above, but minority groups in the United States are still not a focus of research within the context of children's educational programming. Studies of dominant and marginalized images in general entertainment television programming (Briller, 2000; GUMG, 1976a, 1976b, 1982; Lee & Solomon, 1990; Louie, 1995) are frequent, but not within the context of children's educational programming. Also, although racial minorities do make up a part of the character population within educational programs it seemed to me that the characters were sometimes portrayed inaccurately. Therefore, a study on racial portrayals within children's educational television programming seemed appropriate.

My thesis proposes to address the gap in research of children's educational television by looking at race portrayals within *Sesame Street*. My study will begin with a count of the races represented on *Sesame Street*. This count is important because it will indicate if minorities in the United States are also minorities within *Sesame Street* or if there are more minorities than Whites. My thesis will also focus on the portrayals of Hispanics/Latinos, the fastest growing minority group in the United States. I will examine the cultural origin they portray, gender and the setting in which they appear.

Furthermore, I will examine Mexican character portrayals on *Sesame Street*. The Mexican group is the focus of the Hispanic/Latino group because, according to the 2000 United States Census, Mexicans make up the largest population within the Hispanic/Latino race.

It is also important to note here that my study will not use the labels “Hispanic/Latino” and “Mexican” interchangeably. The terms differ significantly. The label “Hispanic/Latino” includes all the peoples of Hispanic/Latino origin: Mexican, Puerto Rican, Cuban, Central American, and Other Hispanic or Latino. When the term “Hispanic/Latino” is used, it refers to all the people of Hispanic/Latino origin. When the label “Mexican” is used, it refers to only those people (human-looking animated characters or puppets) that show clear affiliation with the peoples of Mexico or the Mexican culture.

Although my study will address the two groups mentioned above, caution was taken when writing the thesis so as not to confuse one label for the other. Also in the findings section of the study, the two labels will be differentiated by separately addressing the research questions dealing with Hispanics/Latinos and Mexicans, the subgroup of the Hispanic/Latino group. Where there is a change in reference between the two groups, the change will be explicitly noted.

Studying the portrayals of minority groups, specifically Hispanic/Latino and Mexican, may determine whether there are inaccuracies in the portrayals of these United States groups within *Sesame Street*. Determining whether portrayals are inaccurate can be helpful to producers of educational children’s programming. It may help pinpoint inaccurate messages and images that may exist in their shows and may

also pinpoint accurate messages and images. If shows are showing a true depiction of these groups, producers need to know to continue striving for similar formats. True depictions can help set standards for those programs that may not be mindful to “other” groups.

Children’s educational programming is especially responsible for exhibiting true television images because of their great impact on children. As Baldwin and Hecht state, “media images help construct and reproduce the category systems of those who receive them; yet certain images are produced based on individual views that media creators hold” (1995, p. 87). This is why it is important for these types of shows to be scrutinized. My study does not address the origin, gender, and setting for all the minorities portrayed on *Sesame Street*, but in looking at race, Hispanics/Latinos and Mexicans, I hope to begin the research needed to uncover some of the implicit messages within *Sesame Street*.

Research Questions

The studies that addressed the portrayals in general television have concluded that biases and misrepresentation of racial minorities do exist on television programming. In my study, I hoped to determine if such a tendency was also present in children’s educational programming. I posed the following research questions:

Q1: Do racial groups on *Sesame Street* represent the distribution of the United States population?

Q2: What is the portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino group, the fastest growing minority group in the United States, on *Sesame Street*?

Q3: How are the people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets of Mexican descent portrayed on *Sesame Street*?

The results to these questions will add new knowledge not only to studies that concern the portrayals of groups on children's entertainment television, but also to the large amount of research that has counted and analyzed race portrayals on general television programming. This study will show if a sample children's educational television program carries the same customs as general television of excluding racial minorities or portraying them in a negative light. The focus on Hispanics/Latinos and Mexicans will increase the amount of research that deals with Hispanics/Latinos in the media.

My study is a small-scale content analysis which various groups may find useful. For example, *Sesame Street* producers who want to create racially, sensitive episodes can use these results as information depicting where *Sesame Street* programs are not being racially mindful, where they are, where change needs to be made, and/or where changes do not need to be made. Experts and researchers on the effects of children's television can use this information to conduct studies on how the portrayals that appeared on *Sesame Street* affect various audiences. In other words, do audiences believe that the portrayals of certain groups on *Sesame Street* are accurate? Finally, parents and caregivers can use the outcomes as insight about the implicit messages that are portrayed on *Sesame Street* and might be learned by the children in their care.

Significance of the Study

Sesame Street was chosen for this study because it is the most notable children's educational show. It is a pre-school educational show, created by Sesame Workshop,

(formerly known as the Children's Television Workshop) a non-profit organization. The show airs on Public Broadcasting Stations across the United States. It was also chosen for this investigation for four other reasons. First, the series has a large audience. Tessier argues "a 1996 survey suggested that 95% of American preschoolers have watched *Sesame Street* at some point by the time they are 3 years old" (Tessier, 1996, p. xvi, as cited in Fisch & Truglio, 2001). Furthermore, viewer ratings are usually high, making it one of the top ten children's shows in the United States (PBS Website, 2000).

The second reason for choosing *Sesame Street* for this analysis was because the series was originally created for underrepresented children, particularly from low-income families (Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. xi). The organization wanted to help children of low-income status in their preparation for kindergarten. The show takes pride on using characters of minority status. It has been committed to portraying underrepresented groups through "cooperation and diversity" (Blosser, 1986; p. 84; Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. xvi) and therefore this analysis will show if the mission has been followed through.

Third, since its inception in 1969, the series has been "subject to continual modification and refinement in response to experience and to changing [societal] needs" (Lesser & Schneider, 2001, p. 25). In other words, *Sesame Street* has been very socially conscious and many times has pushed the envelope of socially acceptable media images incorporating a mindful and appreciative environment towards differences. Thus being an excellent candidate for my study since we are going through a cultural revolution in the United States.

The fourth and last reason for choosing *Sesame Street* for this study is because it is an Educational/Informational (E/I) program under program listings, meaning that it meets the Federal Communications Commission's guidelines of "any television program that furthers the educational and informational needs of children 16 years of age and under in any respect, including children's intellectual/cognitive and social/emotional needs" (Federal Communications Commission, 1996, p. 79). The show is an educational program thus what it teaches should be socially responsible. Because the show has such strict self-imposed standards, it has been a model for many other children's television programs and an analysis of how it is representing United States racial underrepresented groups seems appropriate.

Recognizing that children do learn from television, whether what they learn is aggression, education, media preferences, or imagination (Cook, Appleton, Conner, Shaffer, Tankin, & Weber, 1975; Hearold, 1986; Koolstra & van der Voort, 1996; Valkenburg & van der Voort, 1994; Zill, Davis & Daly, 1994), and that most television images do portray a monolithic worldview, this thesis will conclude with a survey of the implications of what such portrayals in children's educational television could have on minority children, more specifically children of Mexican descent. Children of Mexican descent were chosen as the focus for the implications of watching *Sesame Street* images because several of the cultural upbringings and customs of this group differentiate substantially from the culture presented on *Sesame Street*, which could affect the identity of a child of Mexican descent.

CHAPTER 2

CHILDREN'S EDUCATIONAL TELEVISION

Children and Television

Children and television have a unique relationship. Ever since the innovation arrived within the family circle in the 1950's, the combination has been the focus of many studies (Comstock, et al., 1978; National Institute of Mental Health, 1982; & Schram, et al. 1961). During television's early years, it was praised and admired because it was a pastime that brought generations together. Parents and children would sit and watch the same shows and spend "quality time". Although, most of the programs were aimed at adult audiences, there were a few children's programs. (Turow, 1981, p. 23, See Table 1).

In the 1950's the amount of children's programming fluctuated. "[I]ndustry and nonindustry influences" caused these fluctuations (Turow, 1981, p. 24). For example, advertisers desert[ed] children's series for the seemingly greener pastures of "family programs" (Turow, p. 24). In addition, the networks' wrong choice of programming times for the children's programs led to a decrease in viewers, thus decreasing the number of children's series. Children's programming also diminished because of the inconsistent criticism it received from activists. The cartoon, *Heckle and Jeckle*, being a prime example of this contradictory feedback. The National Association for Better Radio and Television (NAFBRAT) said it was a "cartoon series of excellent quality,"

while the National Parent-Teacher Association (PTA) called it “a heap of rubbish” (Turow, 1981, p. 3). The contradictions were only the beginning to future oppositions against children’s television programs.

Table 1

Weekly Hours taken up by Children’s Series, 1948-59

| | 1948-49 | 1950-51 | 1952-53 | 1954-55 | 1956-57 | 1958-59 |
|-------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|---------|
| ABC | 1.50 | 13.75 | 9.00 | 10.00 | 7.75 | 8.75 |
| CBS | 7.00 | 14.50 | 10.75 | 14.00 | 13.00 | 9.50 |
| NBC | 9.00 | 20.50 | 19.00 | 15.25 | 13.50 | 6.00 |
| Total | 17.50 | 48.75 | 38.75 | 39.25 | 34.25 | 24.25 |

Note: The table does not include series scheduled less than once a week.

Source: Turow, 1981, p. 23

Television began to exploit its power to affect, as Robert Lewis Shayon argued in 1950,

Television has no sign on it: “Trespassers will be prosecuted.”

Television is living made easy for our children. It is the shortest cut yet devised, the most accessible back door to the grown-up world.

Television is never too busy to talk to our children. Television plays with them, shares its work with them. Television wants their attention, needs it, and goes to any lengths to get it.

Children were watching television with easy access to the adult and violent content on the networks. According to the Nielsen TV ratings, in 1967 children 11 and under were watching 23.5 hours of programming and in 1976 were watching 27.6 hours (Comstock et. al, 1978, p. 91). Television began to be criticized for making children perform wrongful acts. In other words, children were claiming that if they had not seen certain behaviors modeled on television, they would not have executed them in real-life (Liebert & Sprafkin, 1973). The *Early Window* (1973), by Robert M. Liebert and Joyce Sprafkin, provides a variety of examples of television being an “instigator of violent, aggressive or anti-social behavior” (p. 8). In response to this negative feedback, some television producers took the initiative to create programs that would combat this unfavorable behavior. These shows were based on “storybook television”¹ and “proscenium television of the early fifties”² (Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. 6). The networks also introduced “reality breaks”³ which were short TV segments that contributed to children’s learning (Atkin and Ganz, 1978, p. 183-98). These reality breaks were shown immediately before the beginning of children’s programming and came to be the foundation for the educational children’s programming we have now.

Television as a Socializer

The socialization of children, traditionally, has been performed by societal institutions, such as educational, religious, family and peer groups (Barner, 1999, p.

¹ These are shots of book covers and static, illustrated pages (Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. 6).

² These are camera’s eye-view of a classroom, railroad station, or other fantasy location filled with children (Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. 6).

³ These are non-fiction, information spots about a subject. They “took no more than five minutes and became year-to year Saturday morning mixtures” (Turow, 1981, p. 116)

551; Signorelli, 2001, p. 343). More current studies indicate that mass media are yet another contributor to the socialization of children (Berry & Mitchell-Kernan, 1982; Roberts and Bachen, 1981; Roberts & Macoby, 1985; Tan, Fujioka, Bautista, Maldonado, Tan & Wright, 2000). Barcus (1983) explains, “television provides children with a complex portrait of societal customs, values, morals, and expectations . . . [the] people . . . portrayed can affect children’s perceptions of certain kinds of men and women, and boys and girls.” (p. 69). Because children do learn by imitating models (Bandura, 1969, 1986), they are learning values, morals, language, habits, and accepted behaviors through other mass mediums such as television, magazines, popular music, film, and newspapers and using them as guides for their actions.

In 1975, Littlejohn argued “[t]elevision is the most thoroughly attended to, most pervasive, and probably most influential means of propagating ideas in this country today” (p. 65). It has attracted children so well that over his or her youth a child will spend more hours watching television than he or she spends in school (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001, p. 311). More specifically, the average child will watch at least four hours of television a day (Huntemann & Morgan, p. 311). Because children do watch so much television, and at the same time are being socialized by it, it is important to ask what type of worldview they are being socialized into when they watch these images on television. It is important because “just under the surface of this vast flow of images lie systematic patterns of inclusion and exclusion, of conventions and stereotypes, reflecting ideology and social power” (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001, p. 309).

Some scholars argue that television has had a history of presenting a distorted view of the world and of populous groups in American society (Butsch, 1995; Seiter,

1995; Signorelli, 2001; Stroman, 1991). The majority of television images portray white, upper-middle class, young, thin people with Caucasian features who live in American suburbia. This is seen in adult programming as well as in children's programming. It is certain that not everyone in America lives this lifestyle and that not everyone looks this way, which makes this situation problematic because "if biased media portrayals are frequently presented with the social and psychological power of mass entertainment, they place a burden on the ability of the people to fully understand the meaning associated with living together in a multicultural society" (Wilson & Gutierrez, 1995). Also, the unrealistic social roles being portrayed are especially burdensome for children because their limited experiences don't allow them to differentiate between what is real or fantasy. Thus, they may accept what Himmelstein (1984) calls "myth" (p.1) as reality. Children are in the process of developing an identity for themselves and others (Berry & Asamen, 2001, p. 365) and all the while, may be learning unrealistic social roles and behaviors from these television programs and applying them to their life.

Furthermore, educational children's programming is responsible for constructing a child's worldview for three reasons. First, the shows teach. That is, they have educational lessons installed in the script, which are meant to teach particular lessons. These lessons are usually tested through formative or summative research and producers will only broadcast the show when testing reveals that the educational goals are being met. These lessons, though, may not always center on educational issues. They may also center on "ideological" issues. Therefore what a child is being taught is not what a parent might want their child to learn.

Educational children's programming is also responsible for constructing a child's worldview because it carries the E/I (Entertainment/Informational) label. A study conducted by *Broadcasting & Cable* magazine (Media Report Card, 1997) showed that the label communicated a meaning of FCC approval and of high quality programming, which holds an unquestioning approval by the public based on the belief that broadcasters are meeting E/I government guidelines. Sometimes, though, what producers include or do not include is not necessarily accurate, realistic or of "high quality".

Third, many of these E/I shows are broadcast on local Public Broadcast Stations. Not only are these stations considered to provide high quality programming, as the *Annenberg Public Policy Center* (1998) found, but they are also a broadcast station, free of charge. This makes them accessible to "99% of all United States homes with a TV" (PBS Website, 2001, p. 1) and thus accessible for all economic levels. These three arguments could mean that educational programs teach and when they teach, they can teach what and how the producers prefer to the majority of the country because rarely will the public question the content.

Sesame Street

Sesame Street, a very strong and popular educational children's show, was created to meet the needs of low-income, under-privileged children who were beginning kindergarten at lower academic levels (Fisch & Truglio, 2001; Liebert, 1976; Palmer, Chen, & Lesser, 1976) than their peers. In 1968, the Children's Television Workshop (CTW, now known as Sesame Workshop) created *Sesame Street*. The director was

Joan Ganz Cooney, who had “worked under the umbrella of the Carnegie Corporation and in collaboration with its vice president, Lloyd Morrisett, to craft the original *Sesame Street* proposal, generate essential grant support, plan, and launch CTW” (Fisch & Truglio, 2001, p. 3). The project was an \$8 million proposal that intended to “create, broadcast, promote, and evaluate an experimental educational television series” (Fisch & Truglio, p. 4). *Sesame Street* was born.

After a year of planning and researching, the nonprofit organization came up with *Sesame Street*, a “series aimed at entertaining and teaching children aged three to five, with special emphasis on four year olds . . . [The segments were] fast-moving and action packed, and it portray[ed] humans and puppets interacting in a way designed to teach letters, numbers, principles of classifications, body parts” and prosocial skills (Cook, Appleton, Conner, Shaffer, Tamkin, & Weber, 1975, p. 27). The setting for the show was an urban, inner-city street. Cook et al. (1975), authors of “*Sesame Street*” *Revisited*, describe the principle adult actors as Black and indicated the remainder of the actors would be specifically chosen to represent the social groups of the United States. The show also encouraged racial and intergroup acceptance and cooperation. The planning for this specific type of show had involved researchers, educators, writers, artists, television producers, psychologists and child development experts.

In November of 1969, television and education met. *Sesame Street* was broadcast all over the country on PBS. After six months of broadcasting, the Educational Testing Service (ETS), an independent organization, created achievement tests to analyze the educational benefits of *Sesame Street*. The study outcomes showed that “viewers had made significantly greater gains than non-viewers in most tested areas

of the series' curriculum. [The study also found that] significant gains were made by children from both middle- and low-income circumstances" (Palmer, Chen, & Lesser, 1976, p. 111).

After thirty years of researching and teaching, *Sesame Street* has come to be a social icon. It is now in its fourth decade and continues to be one of the more popular children's shows. In 1999, after thirty years of being on the air, *Sesame Street* ranked fourth among all television programs for children age 2-5 (PBS, 2000, p. 1). The program is also shown in its original format and language in over 40 countries (Palmer, Chen, & Lesser, 1976, p. 109). There are also foreign language adaptations that have taken the co-production format and are shown in over 19 countries (Palmer et al., p. 109).

Currently, the United States' version of the show is going through some changes. The Reno Gazette-Journal (February 5, 2002) outlines some of them: viewers are getting younger, lessons are changing, the hour-long "street story" will be a 10-minute segment instead of being revisited throughout the entire show, and Spanish lessons are being incorporated. Also, "Journey to Ernie" will become a daily segment in which Big Bird looks for Ernie in a computer-animated world. These changes will provide a new look to *Sesame Street* as it tries to "keep in tune with society" (Reno Gazette-Journal, 2002, p. 2).

The show has not usually been the target of criticism or rejection, yet not everyone approves of the series. In other words, criticism towards the show does exist. Robert Hilliard (2001), author of *Media, Education, and America's Counter-Culture Revolution* reveals some of that criticism.

“Sesame Street” has a setting that middle-class white suburbia might mistake for a block of the disadvantaged inner city. . . [and] white-middle-class producers [need to acknowledge] the more important things the ghetto child needs to learn is how to escape being beaten by the police, how to avoid being gang-raped . . . how to talk back to the white neighborhood merchant who has cheated you, [or] how to [avoid drugs] (p. 104).

He goes on to state that both white-middle class and urban kids think *Sesame Street* is great, but he questions the degree of help that disadvantaged children are really getting to “understand and cope with the special problems of his or her disadvantaged life” (p. 105).

John Holt, an educator and activist for a better American educational system states *Sesame Street*

has aimed too low, has misunderstood the problem it is trying to cure . . . and underestimated the opportunities of its chief subject, the three R’s [reading, writing and arithmetic. Also, in the program] everything . . . must be deliberately *taught* . . . [L]earning on “Sesame Street,” as in school, means learning right answers, and as in school, Right Answers come from grown-ups. We rarely see children figuring things out. As in school, we hear children responding, without much animation or imagination (Holt as cited in Hilliard, 2001, p. 105).

The criticism continues, and this time from abroad. Canada’s Broadcasting Corporation (CBC) stated they found *Sesame Street* to be “greatly lacking and of virtually no value

for Canada's future planning" (CBC as cited in Hilliard, p. 105). The British Broadcasting Company (BBC) "criticized the programs [as having] "essentially middle-class attitudes" and noted its "lack of reality and its attempt to prepare children for school but not for life" (Hilliard, p. 106). Hilliard ends his comments by stating that maybe someday a children's show will be set in a real street like 125th Street in Harlem, 7th Street N.W. in Washington D.C. or Olvera Street in Los Angeles, "where rat, rape, and revolution come closer to the real three R's than a whole cave full of make-believe jewels that only the white and/or middle class will have access to" (p. 106).

Heather Hendershot (1999), author of "*Sesame Street: Cognition and Communications, Imperialism*", also questions some of the tactics used by the Children's Television Workshop. She states, "the show should be scrutinized for both its objectifying child-testing practices and its international production and distribution practices" (p. 140). For example, for international production, segments that make reference to American culture are discarded and host countries

pick the bulk of their program material from the CTW's leased library of "culturally neutral" *Sesame Street* footage [, yet,] the problem is that *Sesame Street* in and of itself is American culture. Weeding out segments that parody American rock singers or movie stars does not make the program neutral (p. 163).

Hendershot believes *Sesame Street* is mass-producing a children's culture and erasing worldwide individuality. In her article, she also describes other accounts of criticism that have attacked *Sesame Street* in the past. For example, the show has been criticized for allowing communists such as Pete Seeger on the show. Also, some have

said the show “indoctrinates [children] into an anti-Christian, anti-national, face-less, race-less, one-worldism” (p. 150). And it “purposely tries to indoctrinate children into complete disregard of racial distinctions and racial pride” (p. 150). Hendershot also includes the thoughts of Laurence Jarvik, a conservative politician from the Heritage Foundation. Jarvik asks, “If *Sesame Street* was so effective, why do we have such a literacy problem” (p. 171)? Hendershot concludes by stating

Sesame Street and the CTW should not be off-limits to critical investigation. . . . [Its] symbolic stature discourages media critics from putting the show under their analytic microscope, but it is precisely because the show is such a potent cultural symbol that it must be subjected to close analysis. . . . [Furthermore,] we need to ask not only why some images are contested, but also why other images are praised (p. 172).

As Hendershot remarks, *Sesame Street* needs to come under closer scrutiny and this is what this master’s thesis proposes to do in a small way.

Fisch and Truglio (2001, p. xvii) state *Sesame Street* has been examined in over 1000 studies. The majority of these studies have been on literacy, number skills, prosocial skills, and children’s attention. Yet, racial distribution and minority portrayals, an area this master’s thesis hopes to address, have not been researched. Actually, the little formative research that has dealt with cultural portrayals or identity within *Sesame Street* or any other children’s educational television programming for that matter, “has not been fed back into the production” (Ball & Bogatz, 1970 and Bogatz & Ball, 1971 as cited in Blosser, 1986) process. Because “children are the most

susceptible to accepting without question this image of reality that television presents”

(Blosser, 1986, p. 88) the information presented to them should be accurate.

CHAPTER 3

HEGEMONY THEORY

Theoretical Framework

Hegemony theory was used as the theoretical framework for this study. This theory joins power with consent. In defining hegemony, Artz & Murphy (2000) have said it is “the process of moral, philosophical and political leadership that a social group attains only with the active consent of other important social groups” (p. 1). Tom Bottomore (1991), defines it from another view stating it means “domination as in ‘hegemony’; and secondly . . . leadership, implying some notion of consent” (p. 231). Still another writer, Consalvo (1998) who has applied the theory to a television content analysis, states it this way: “the ruling class exercises power and maintains control”, but in doing so, will never use force (p. 64). The theory was translated from Italian into English in the 1970’s and since then has been used widely as an approach for “studies of popular culture [and] ideology and [used by] the intellectuals [of] a Marxist perspective” (Sassoon, 2000, p. 15).

Italian scholar Antonio Gramsci (1891-1937) is the father of hegemony theory. Gramsci’s theory arises from his belief that the concept of socialism would not function unless there was an alliance between the working class and the elites. Throughout his life, Gramsci was an active participant in the socialist movement. In 1913, he joined the Italian Socialist Party (PSI); in 1919 he helped found a new Turin socialist weekly; in

1921 he founded the Italian Communist Party (PCI); and finally, in 1924, when elected to Parliament he tried to “transform the PCI from the sectarianism . . . into a party rooted in the mass movement” (Bottomore, 1991, p. 221-222). Gramsci’s political career and actions would wear on his contemporaries.

In 1926, the Fascist government captured Gramsci and sent him to prison for 20 years, where his writings took the form of the *Prison Notebooks* (1929-35). These notebooks are Gramsci’s most notable work, but also his most confusing work. The notebooks cut across the many years he was in prison. They have themes and fragments that carry over into each other, which then refer to other segments within the books, and still, use the same words to describe various meanings (Sassoon, 1987, p. 13). The books are filled with themes such as “revolution as a process, the political nature of organisational questions, the changed relationship between economics and politics, the importance of culture and the role of the intellectuals, the argument against a mechanistic interpretation of Marxism, the novel nature of the socialist State and hence of the revolutionary party, [and more specifically,] the nature of dominance of the bourgeoisie” (Martin, 1998, p. 3; Sassoon, 1987, p. 109) over the working class. This issue of the upper class dominating the lower class without the use of force is the very concept of hegemony.

Gramsci provides the basis of hegemony by first explaining the supremacy (Sassoon, 1987, p. 111) of a class and then explaining the conditions it must meet to be able to dominate lower groups. He states:

The supremacy of a social group manifests itself in two ways, as ‘domination’ and as ‘intellectual and moral leadership’. A social group

dominates antagonistic groups, which it tends to 'liquidate', or to subjugate perhaps even by armed force; it leads kindred and allied groups. A social group can, and indeed must, already exercise 'leadership' before winning governmental power (this indeed is one of the principle conditions for the winning of such power); it subsequently becomes dominant when it exercises power, but even if it holds it firmly in his grasp, it must continue to lead as well (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks* as cited in Sassoon, 1987, p. 111).

Within that statement, Gramsci mentions the first two conditions in accomplishing hegemony: power and leadership (Sassoon, p. 111).

The next step toward hegemonic civilization is to invoke ideology through consent. The bourgeoisie, the upper class, elite or as Gramsci described them, the *intellectuals* (those that already have the function of *intellectuals* [meaning they are already in power] (Storey, 1993, p. 120)), must instill their ideas within the lower groups, but in a consensual way. In other words, the ideology should not be pushed upon the working class by force.

The *intellectuals* can impose their ideology in two stages. The first is to form alliances with the leaders of subgroups (Sassoon, 1987, p. 111). For example, in contemporary politics, this would mean that the elite, capitalist, big business owners, for example the Children's Television Workshop/Sesame Workshop (CTW), would go to the president of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) to form an alliance. The next step would be to kindly impose the proposition on the ally and ask them to disperse it among its members, but at the same time giving

the ally and the members a reward for following the rules (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. viii). This would mean that after the alliance between CTW and the NAACP was formed, CTW would tell the president of the NAACP that they need him/her to do something for them. For example, act a certain way, do something a certain way, or support them in the way they asked, but also, agree to disperse that idea on other members of the NAACP and finally have that idea trickle down to the African American community. The president, the members and the African American community would get a reward for doing as asked. The reward may be economic or maybe one of their needs or policies would get pushed through red tape faster because CTW is supporting them. By agreeing to do as asked in exchange for a reward, the hegemony begins. Gramsci explains this beginning by stating,

Undoubtedly the fact of hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed – in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. But there is also no doubt that such sacrifices and such compromise cannot touch the essential [to continue to dominate]; for though hegemony is ethical-political, it must also be economic, must necessarily be based on the decisive function exercised by the leading group in the decisive nucleus of economic activity (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, as cited in Sassoon, 1987, p. 116).

Therefore, courteousness and economical reward are extremely important in achieving hegemony. Now, if the dominance is to continue, “the relationship between

intellectuals and people-nation, between leaders and the led, the rulers and the ruled [should have] an organic cohesion in which feeling-passion becomes understanding and thence knowledge (not mechanically but in a way that is alive)” (Gramsci, *Prison Notebooks*, as cited in Sassoon, 1987, p. 124). Put another way, the *intellectuals* must really be in touch with the people and understand their needs. They must see the needs of those they are trying to dominate as truly important needs and try to justify them, tying them in to the present times. This action will create thorough understanding and acceptance, which leads to knowledge. By having knowledge the powerful can know where, how or what to reward a group when it needs that group to follow their lead. It is important, though, that the interest of the subordinate groups are met because as Artz and Murphy (2000) state, “[w]ithout conscious choice [of leadership and rewards], hegemony disappears, and the social order slips to various forms of domination, coercion, or co-optation” (p. 3) which could lead the “subordinates [to] organize, revolt, and find other allies” (p. 2) to defeat the *intellectuals*.

There is power through consent in all areas of our life. There is the boss over worker, the teacher over student, parent over child and yes, also media over consumer relationship (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 2). The media, especially television, is an example of how hegemony theory is applied. For example, we see a particular fashion on television, we know it is not affordable, but we see that the model on the commercial is getting much attention for wearing it; something within us agrees that maybe we should purchase the item. In this case, there is power (the advertisement), consent (the act of purchasing, even if not in the best interest), and a tangible benefit (people will

admire our taste) in one simple example. In a larger context, images on television programs are just as prone to being part of hegemony theory as commercials.

In general, television programs elicit support for “hegemonic relations through patterns of communication and material reward” (Artz & Murphy, 2000, p. 3). The rewards may include showing the consumer the latest trends, the latest news, entertainment and fashion styles. Some even teach cognitive skills. The television-consumer relation follows the same rules of the political model of hegemony theory. Producers instill an idea within the program and then provide it as programming that the viewer wants to watch. The viewer benefits because they have a program they enjoy, are able to relax while watching it, are entertained or are taught something new. On the other hand, producers increase viewer ratings and maybe even include cleverly marketed products during the program or commercials that the viewer will purchase. If the viewer purchases these products, the producer, the *intellectual*, gains even more money to continue their influence over the viewer. In delivering their programming, writers, producers and owners of stations and networks, those basically in power, obtain what they want: revenue, but never by using force.

Many times, television programs also deliver an ideology. This ideology may include opinions on social issues, politics, gender roles, race relations, and/or class, which the viewer will usually accept as the norm, standard, or reality of the world because it is the image that abounds in the programming. The viewer will imitate and accept these views, seeing them as what is socially acceptable and in accepting, the viewers create a class of people that believe and live out the needs of the powerful. As Artz and Murphy argue, “communication in the United States is directed largely by

corporations that dominate public-decision making and influence everyday life” (2000, p. 28). It is safe to say that the ideology that is presented and disseminated to the public is dominant ideology.

Hegemony theory “is the context in which to study political power, ideology and culture [because] it helps complement the . . . subordinate classes with that of the dominant ones” (Sassoon, 1987, p. xix). With that said, this master’s thesis determined what ideology was portrayed through the people and various human-looking, animated character or puppet images apparent in the popular children’s educational program, *Sesame Street*. What was the worldview portrayed on *Sesame Street* and how did groups such as the Hispanic/Latino groups benefit by accepting that worldview? In other words, how does *Sesame Street* instill the hegemony onto the Hispanic/Latino viewers and minority children of Mexican descent? This master’s thesis will look to answer these questions through, “the systematic study of media messages” (Barner, 1999, p. 555). In other words, a content analysis.

CHAPTER 4

METHOD

Content analysis is “literally an assessment of the messages of mass media” (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001, p. 313) which involves tallies and counting. This type of analysis is common in the study of media messages. For example there are content analysis studies in advertising (Furnham & Farragher, 2000; Smith, 1994), television reality programming (Oliver, 1994; Potter, Warren, Vaughan, Howley, Land & Hagemeyer, 1997), television violence (Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997; Potter & Smith, 2000) and children’s television programming (Weiss & Wilson, 1996). After the images are tallied, Huntemann and Morgan (2001) state,

a general inventory of the most common images and representations in mass media is developed. This inventory is categorized into themes such as sex roles; the depiction of race, gender, class and sexuality; and portrayals of work, politics, and citizenship (p. 313).

This inventory will then allow a researcher to either apply the findings to theoretical frameworks or make connections to participant and interviewer studies.

Focus. This study did a content analysis of the various people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets appearing on *Sesame Street*. It coded all the various people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets into a race category. The Hispanic/Latino race was also coded for ethnicity/origin, gender and the setting in

which they appeared. Coding origin, gender and settings for Hispanics/Latinos allowed me to make analyses regarding the portrayals of Hispanics/Latinos on *Sesame Street*.

Sample. The sample consisted of a total of twenty (20) *Sesame Street* programs that aired on Channel 10, the local Las Vegas, Nevada, Public Broadcasting Station. The shows came from four consecutive weeks of programming that began on April 12, 2002 and aired through May 10, 2002. The episode on May 7, 2002 was eliminated from the sample because of the recording quality. The 4-week-sample was a randomly chosen sample constituted to be representative of *Sesame Street*. All the shows were recorded during a weekday (Monday through Friday) morning from 8:00 a.m. to 9:00 a.m..

One month's worth of *Sesame Street* programming was considered to be an appropriate amount of programming for this study because this size was consistent with previous content analysis of television images (Barner, 1999; Chang, Wang, & Chen, 1998; Furnham & Farragher; Mastro & Greenberg; 2000; Mustonen & Pulkkinen, 1997; Potter & Smith, 2000; Potter, Warren, Vaughan, Howley, Land, & Hagemeyer, 1997; Smith, 1994). Also, the recorded shows would not overlap during one month's worth of programming. Some of the segments or sections within the episodes did overlap, but the overall theme of the show did not. If sections did overlap, the images of people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets were still counted each time they appeared. The twenty-hour sample is slightly more than Barner's 1999, 16-hour study of children's educational programming, but the increase in hours added to the reliability of my study. The amount I used was also within the sample size of the majority of some of the latest television programming content analyses.

Coding. Only the people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets within *Sesame Street* were analyzed in this content analysis. The person, human-looking, animated character or puppet had to show their entire face or profile to be included in the tallies. Images of a character's back or other body parts were not counted. Photographed images, drawings, pictures, or paintings of people were not included in the tallies. A character had to move his or her body parts in order to be tallied. All people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets were categorized into one of the "Race" categories. Only the Hispanic/Latino group was categorized into the "Origin," "Gender," and "Setting" categories.

Process. Two coders watched the 20 episodes of *Sesame Street* and made a list of all the characters that were showing their face or profile, thus including only those that fit the definition above. There were a total of 1,328 qualifying individual/group tallies. After the list (See APPENDIX I for sample list) was completed, the coders watched the 20 shows, each with their own list of 1,328 characters, and tallied each character into the categories they believed applied to each character. The categories are described below. The coders did not consult with each other during the viewing process.

Categories and Codes

The categories for race were taken from the 2000 United States Census Bureau's descriptions of race. The race of the individual character was categorized under one of the following: White; Black or African American; American Indian and Alaska Native; Asian; Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander; Hispanic or Latino; Two or More

Races; Other; and Unknown (Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000). The race of groups was categorized under one of the following: Heterogeneous Group; Homogenous Group; Race of Homogenous Group; and Unknown Race of Group.

Members of the Hispanic/Latino group were also tallied for origin, gender, and setting. The following were the categories for Hispanic/Latino origin: Mexican; Puerto Rican; Cuban; Central American; Other Hispanic or Latino; Two Origins; and Unknown (Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000). Coding for origin allowed me to see what Hispanic/Latino group was mostly represented and which one was least represented on *Sesame Street*. The following were the categories for Hispanic/Latino gender: Male; Female; and Unknown. The gender category assisted me in finding what the dominant gender was for the Hispanics/Latinos portrayed on *Sesame Street*. Lastly, the setting in which Hispanics/Latinos appeared was also coded. The following were the categories for Hispanic/Latino setting: Rural; Urban; Suburb; Child care, school, recreational center; Inside house; Outdoors *Sesame Street*; Indoors *Sesame Street*; Other; and Unknown. The setting category allowed me to infer about what class each person, human-looking, animated character or puppet portrayed belonged in. In other words, the background in which the Hispanic/Latino character appeared gave me insight about where they spent their time, resided, or worked, thus allowing for a classification of class.

Race (Individuals)

Every person, human-looking, animated character or puppet was placed in one of the following categories. The definitions of the first seven race categories were taken

from the United States Census 2000. I defined the last two race categories: “Other” and “Unknown”.

- “ ‘White’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Europe, the Middle East, or North Africa. It includes people who indicated their race or races as ‘White’ or wrote in entries such as Irish, German, Italian, Lebanese, Near Easterner, Arab, Polish” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- “ ‘Black or African American’ refers to people having origins in any of the Black racial groups of Africa. It includes people who indicated their race or races as ‘Black, African Am., or Negro,’ or wrote in entries such as African American, Afro American, Nigerian, or Haitian” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- “ ‘American Indian and Alaska Native’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of North and South America (including Central America), and who maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment. It includes people who indicated their race or races by marking this category or writing in their principal or enrolled tribe, such as Rosebud Sioux, Chippewa, or Navajo” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- “ ‘Asian’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of the Far East, Southeast Asia, or the Indian subcontinent. It includes people who indicated their race or races as ‘Asian Indian,’ ‘Chinese,’ ‘Filipino,’ ‘Korean,’ ‘Japanese,’ ‘Vietnamese,’ or ‘Other Asian,’ or wrote in entries such as Burmese, Hmong, Pakistani, or Thai” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- “ ‘Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Hawaii, Guam, Samoa, or other Pacific Islands. It

includes people who indicated their race or races as ‘Native Hawaiian,’ ‘Guamanian or Chamorro,’ ‘Samoaan,’ or ‘Other Pacific Islander,’ or wrote in entries such as Tahitian, Mariana Islander, or Chuukese” (Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- ‘Hispanic or Latino’ refers to people having origins in any of the original peoples of Puerto Rico, Mexico, Central America, South America, and Spain and who do not maintain tribal affiliation or community attachment to an American Indian or Alaska Native tribe (Office of Management and Budget as cited in Grieco & Cassidy, 2001, p. 2).

- “ ‘Two or More Races’ refers to people who chose more than one of the six race categories” (Jones & Smith, 2001, p. 1) on the United States Census 2000. People, human-looking, animated characters or puppets were placed in this category if they explicitly mentioned that they identified with more than one race, if they were shown with parents of different races, and/or their physical, facial features portrayed two races. An example of a portrayal of two races was a character with blonde hair, light colored eyes, but with Asian features such as eyes stretched at the corners and olive to light skin. A character was also placed in this category if it was known by the coders that the character’s ancestry was of two races. For example, Madonna, the famous American pop singer’s first daughter, Lourdes, is Latino and White; therefore she would be placed in this category. (Furthermore, her origin, gender and the setting in which she was portrayed would also be categorized because she is part Hispanic/Latino.)

- ‘Other’ refers to people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets who explicitly mentioned or displayed that they were of a race that did not fall into any of the race categories described above.

- ‘Unknown’ refers to people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets in which it is not clear what race they should fall into.

Race (Groups)

On *Sesame Street*, people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets are often shown together in groups. Views of these groups are short (in time) and are shot in long shots (spatial depth). Therefore, it was very difficult to analyze exactly what racial category each individual in these groups fell into because the people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets were either moving around quickly, were too far off in the distance, or were too many to count. Six or more people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets constituted a group. Groups were only coded for race.

- **Heterogeneous Groups:** Groups of six or more in which more than one race was visually represented in the scene.

- **Homogenous Groups:** Groups of six or more in which only one race was represented in the scene. The race of the homogenous group was noted in a separate tally.

- **Race of Homogenous Group:** The race of a homogenous group was characterized with a number corresponding to a race from “Race (Individuals)” list.

- **Unknown Race of Group:** If a group (six or more people) appeared in the shot, but the individuals were too far off in the distance to determine what race they represented and it was not clear whether they made up a homogenous or heterogeneous group, then the group’s race was coded in this category.

Hispanic/Latino Category

Any person, human-looking, animated character or puppet fell under this category if they appeared to be Latino, that is, they had olive skin, dark hair, and dark eyes and the person, human-looking, animated character or puppet had a Spanish name such as José, María, or Ernesto, or a surname such as García, Hernandez, or Guerrero, spoke Spanish, used Spanish dialogue, and/or talked about places, customs, and traditions that came from a Latin American country or from Spain. In order to place a Latino in a certain ethnicity/origin category, the character was analyzed in five ways:

- **Attire:** The clothing the character wore reflected the country/location of origin or descent.

- **Language:** The character's Spanish accent was listened to and determined to reflect a country/location. Dialect or colloquialisms were also used as guides in placing a person in an origin category. What they talked about was also analyzed. For example, if the character specifically mentioned that her parents were born in Puerto Rico or that every summer she vacationed to Puerto Rico to visit her family, then she was placed in the "Puerto Rican" origin category.

- **Traditions and customs:** The character was portrayed in the context of a tradition or custom. For example, if a Latino child mentioned that for his birthday he broke open a *piñata*, he was placed in the "Mexican" category. The tradition of *piñatas* for birthdays comes from México, therefore the child was categorized as Mexican. If the child mentioned that her favorite dish at home was *papusas*, she was placed in the "Central American" category. This food item is customary in El Salvador; therefore the child would be placed in the "Central American" category.

- **Family:** A child may be placed in the context of a family. If the parents mentioned they were of a certain ethnicity/origin, then the child was also considered to be of that ethnicity/origin.

- If the character looked Hispanic/Latino and was coded as Hispanic/Latino in the race category, but did not wear traditional attire, did not speak Spanish with a certain country's accent or did not mention anything that would place him or her in a certain ethnic category, then he or she was placed in the "Unknown" category. A character was also placed in the "Unknown" category if in one individual segment it was unclear to which ethnicity/origin he/she fell into because they wore three or more different outfits from different Latin American countries or Spain, spoke with three different accents, and/or mentioned three or more ethnic traditions or customs.

Hispanic/Latino Origin

After the Hispanic/Latino character was analyzed by the five ways described above, he or she was tallied into one of the following categories:

- **Mexican:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets who are of Mexican descent.

- **Puerto Rican:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets who are of Puerto Rican descent.

- **Cuban:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets who are of Cuban descent.

- **Central American:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets who are of Guatemalan, Honduran, Belizean, El Salvadorian, Costa Rican, Panamanian, and Nicaraguan descent (Guzmán, 2001, p. 3).

- **Other Hispanic or Latino:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets who are of Dominican, South American and or Spanish descent (Guzmán, 2001, p. 3).

- **Two origins:** People, human-looking, animated characters or puppets that reflected two origins listed in the first five “Hispanic or Latino Origin” categories. For example, a child who was shown with a Cuban father and a Mexican mother fell in this category. People, human-looking, animated characters or puppets that reflected the Hispanic/Latino race and another race not Hispanic/Latino also fell into this category. An example would be Madonna’s daughter, Lourdes. She would fall into this category if she was shown with her Hispanic/Latino father and her White mother.

- **Unknown:** People or human-looking, animated characters or puppets that did not wear traditional attire, did not speak Spanish with a certain country’s accent or did not mention anything that would place him or her in a certain ethnic category. A character was also placed in the “Unknown” category if in one segment it was unclear to which ethnicity/origin they fell into because they wore three or more different outfits from different Latin American countries or Spain, spoke with three different accents, and/or mentioned three or more ethnic traditions or customs.

Hispanic/Latino groups were not coded for origin because there may have been three or more origins in the group.

Hispanic/Latino Gender

The gender of the Hispanic/Latino population (people, human-looking, animated character or puppet) was placed in one of the following categories. The gender category allowed the researcher to see how many male and female Hispanics/Latinos appeared on *Sesame Street*.

- **Male:** This category included any person, human-looking, animated character or puppet that had visible male characteristics. If physical features were ambiguous, behavior was observed next. Stereotypical “male” behavior included “construction, dominance, aggression, and autonomy” (Ruble & Ruble, 1982; Williams & Best, 1982 as cited in Barner, 1999, p. 257).
- **Female:** This category included any person, human-looking animated character or puppet that had visible female characteristics. If physical characteristics were ambiguous, then behavior was observed next. Stereotypical “female” behavior included “deference, harm avoidance, dependence, and nurturance” (Ruble & Ruble, 1982; Williams & Best, 1982 as cited in Barner, 1999, p. 557).
- **Unknown:** Previous content analysis (Barner, 1999) have shown that gender can sometimes be ambiguous, therefore unknown. My content analysis included the “Unknown” category in case this situation occurred for a person, human-looking, animated character or puppet. These characters will still be included in the total character sample size.

Hispanic/Latino groups were not coded for gender because there may have been more than one gender in the group.

Hispanic/Latino Setting

The setting in which the Hispanic/Latino population (people, human-looking, animated character or puppet) appeared on *Sesame Street* were categorized into one of the following:

- **Rural:** Realistic outdoors, desolate areas. Examples included: plains with lots of grass, fields, and a few scattered trees; desert, sand, tumbleweeds, and cacti; snow, forests, lakes, snow covered hills; islands, beaches, very little building structures, waterfalls; or farming areas, fields, and crops.
- **Urban:** Realistic outdoors, busy streets, litter on streets, cracked asphalt, chipped sidewalks, basketball courts with chain link fences around them, taxis, parking meters, fenced parks, city skyline, car horns, and public transportation sounds. This category does not include the “in-studio” *Sesame Street*, which is also “urban”. This category only includes urban on-location/outdoor shots.
- **Suburb:** Realistic outdoors, no litter, small town, garden-lined streets, few cars, colorful store windows, small, privately-owned businesses, backyards, brightly colored jungle gyms in parks without chain-link fences, white picket fences and quiet.
- **Inside child-care, school, recreational or educational center:** Indoors, for example libraries, school rooms or other children’s center. The rooms can have desks, books, carpets, easels, mats, tables, wooden floors on basketball courts, and walls must be apparent.
- **Inside house:** Indoor, kitchen, dining room, living room, bedroom, couches, beds, carpet, fireplace, Christmas tree or other indoor holiday decorations, appliances, and television sets.

- **Outdoors *Sesame Street*:** Studio rendition of an urban street, brick buildings, windows, and doors with triangles, squares and circles cut into them, painted pebble stone street, no real cars, clean, colorful area, bright, blue sky, puppet monsters and animals living and walking on this street and/or people, puppets, and monsters sitting on stoops.

- **Indoors *Sesame Street*:** Colorful rooms, offices, stages, and bright backgrounds shot in the studio, puppet animals and/or monsters usually appearing in scenes.

- **Other:** Places that do not fit any of the above descriptions, but portray a recognizable location. For example, inside an airplane or inside a spaceship.

- **Unknown:** Places that are not visually explicit as to which setting category they fall into because there is not enough landscape or depth in the scene to place a Hispanic/Latino in a certain setting category.

Hispanic/Latino groups were not coded for setting because backgrounds in which the groups appeared changed constantly.

Class Classification

The setting in which a character appeared gave an indication as to what class they fell into. After reviewing Census 2000 briefs concerning class, I came up with the following reasons for placing a setting in a certain class. The three class classifications that were used were: Neutral; Lower; and Middle to Upper class.

- “Rural” was considered lower class because most of the occupations in the landscape described in the rural definition category gave rise to lower paying positions and therefore, there was a lower class stature associated.

- “Urban” was considered lower class because the inner city areas, ghettos, and *barrios* portrayed on *Sesame Street* usually had people residing in them who were of the working class, dressed humbly, and surrounded themselves with the landscape described in the “Urban” category.

- “Suburb” was considered to be middle to upper class because the landscape described in the “Suburb” category would have professional positions and professional people residing in that type of landscape. Also because most middle to high income level people live in suburbs.

- The “Child care, school, recreational center, library” category was classified as neutral. I did not give this category a class because it was too difficult to place these settings in a certain landscape. In other words, the inside of a kindergarten classroom or library could look the same in a rural and urban area; there are toys and books.

Therefore, a class distinction was not made for this category.

- The “Inside house” category was also a neutral category. The individuals who appeared inside a home were not placed in a class category because the way people keep a room in their homes, doesn’t necessarily indicate what working position they may hold, how much money they or their parents make, or where that house is located.

- “Outdoors *Sesame Street*” was considered lower class. This setting is a studio rendition of an urban street (even if it is clean and bright) therefore it was considered lower class for the reasons made for the “Urban” category.

- The “Indoors *Sesame Street*” category was considered to be middle to upper class. The reasons being that most indoor rooms within *Sesame Street* are very much like what one would find in a suburb. They are neat, bright, lighting is great, everything

is new, there is up-to-date, working technology and there are usually professional people residing within suburbs. Also, the shots are within a television production facility and most children of lower class rarely have access to this type of setting - many might have never heard of a television studio. Middle to high upper class children and adults might see the *Sesame Street* indoor studio shots more attainable than a child from South Central, Los Angeles.

- The “Other” category was considered neutral because it was impossible to know to what class a child belonged when all that could be seen behind him was a blue wall.

- “Unknown” is neutral, also, because if the coder could not distinguish the background or setting in which the character was placed, it would be inappropriate to place him/her in a class.

Coder Information

The tallies were performed by two Latino coders. One coder was a female, graduate student of Mexican descent. The other was a male, undergraduate student of Nicaraguan and Salvadorean descent. Both coders had experiences with the cultures they ascend from and have a keen understanding of them. Using two coders who had experience with various Hispanic/Latino origins for a study with an emphasis on Hispanic/Latino portrayals added to the reliability of the content analysis because the coders were aware of the various Hispanic/Latino origins that exist and were not just directed towards one origin. Latino coders were also used to perform this content analysis which dealt with unearthing the portrayals of minority groups because as Flores

(2000) argues: “[T]he analysis of dominant or master narratives from marginalized perspectives offers a means of uncovering the implicit messages that help to maintain the status quo” (p. 41) - which is what this master’s thesis proposed to do.

The graduate student trained the undergraduate student by going over three shows and demonstrating to him how the categories applied to the various people, human-looking, animated characters or puppets. The training took a total of 24 hours. The coders used the category descriptions during the coding process to refer back to category definitions. After all the shows were viewed and tallied by both coders, intercoder reliability was computed using Scott’s π (Scott, 1955; Zwick, 1988). Results were as follows: race categories ($\pi = .89$), Hispanic/Latino Origin ($\pi = .85$), Hispanic/Latino Gender ($\pi = 1.0$), and Hispanic/Latino Setting ($\pi = 1.0$). After Scott’s π for reliability was computed, the two coders compared their results. If the coders disagreed in their coding decisions about a character, they reviewed the scene in which the character in question appeared and together came to a consensus.

The characters in each category were totaled and analyzed in order to answer the three research questions. Frequencies and cross-tabulations were computed using the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS).

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

In total, there were 1,328 individual/group tallies that came from the 20 episodes. This number included the 1,245 (93.8%) individuals and the 83 (6.3%) groups that were coded. (See Table 2).

Table 2
Individual or Group

| | | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Group | 83 | 6.3 | 6.3 | 6.3 |
| | Individual | 1245 | 93.8 | 93.8 | 100.0 |
| | Total | 1328 | 100.0 | 100.0 | |

The 1,328 individuals/groups tallies also included repetitive characters and groups- meaning that each character or group was counted each time it appeared. There was an average of 66.4 individual/group tallies per episode. The episode with the least amount had 34 individual/group tallies and the one with the most, 111.

The races of the individuals and groups combined were as follows: White, 592 (44.6%); Black or African American, 231 (17.4%); American Indian and Alaska Native, 11 (.8%); Asian, 120 (9.0%); Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander 1, (.1%);

Hispanic or Latino, 128 (9.6%); Two or More Races, 96 (7.2%); Other, 14 (1.1%); and Unknown, 135 (10.2%). Of the 96 individuals/groups who fell under the Two or More Races category, only 9 (.7% of the total individual/group count) had a Hispanic/Latino background. The remaining 87 (6.6%) did not have a Hispanic/Latino background. Later in the study, the 9 that did have a Hispanic/Latino background were added to the total count of Hispanic/Latino individuals and were coded for origin, gender, and setting.

Under the Hispanic/Latino origin category, there were 133 qualifying individuals representing 10% of the total individual/group count. The distribution was as follows: Mexican, 8 (.6%); Puerto Rican, 1 (.1%); Cuban, 2 (.2%); Central American, 2 (.2%); Other Hispanic or Latino, (.2%); and Unknown origin, 117 (8.8%). There were 1,195 individuals/groups that were not included in this tally because they either were not Hispanic/Latino or they were found in a group. Groups were not tallied for origin even if they were of Hispanic/Latino descent because there may have been many origins represented in the people of the group.

Again there were 133 (10%) qualifying characters for the Hispanic/Latino gender category. The distribution was as follows: Male, 56 (4.2%); Female, 75 (5.6%); and Unknown, 2 (.2%). There were 1195 (90%) individual/group tallies that were not included in the gender category because they were not of Hispanic/Latino descent or because they were a group.

The last frequency was done for Hispanic/Latino settings. The outcomes for the 133 (10%) qualifying individuals (not including groups) were as follows: Rural, 121 (.9%); Urban, 16 (1.2%); Suburb, 2 (.2%); Child care, school, recreational center,

library, 6 (.5%); Inside house, 13 (1.0%); Outdoors *Sesame Street*, 32 (2.4%); Indoors *Sesame Street*, 37 (2.8%); Other, 10 (.8%); and Unknown, 5 (.4%) of the entire individual/group tallies.

Research Question #1

The first research question that my study looked to answer with this content analysis was:

Q1. Do racial groups on *Sesame Street* represent the distribution of the United States population?

According to the United States Census 2000, the population distribution was as follows: White, 194,552,774 (69.1%); Black or African American, 33,947,837 (12.1%); American Indian and Alaska Native, 2,068,883 (0.7%); Asian, 10,131,188 (3.6%); Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, 345,489 (0.1%); Hispanic or Latino, 35,305,818 (12.5%); Two or More Races, 4,602,146 (1.6%); and Other, 467,770 (0.2%). The United States Census does not include an “Unknown” category. The “Unknown” race category used in the content analysis was not used for this comparison because there weren’t any numbers on the United States Census to compare them with. The numbers above were used to compare the United States population to the race of the individuals (not groups) on *Sesame Street*. (See the Table 3 for comparisons).

According to the comparisons above *Sesame Street* did differ from the distribution of the United States population. It appears that *Sesame Street* reduced the images of Whites to increase the individuals of minority races, which is something that should be applauded since the show does pride itself on being a multicultural program.

Table 3

Race Distribution of the United States Population, 2000 and *Sesame Street*, 2002

| Race | United States Population, 2000 | | <i>Sesame Street</i> , 2002 | |
|--|--------------------------------|---------|-----------------------------|---------|
| | N | Percent | N | Percent |
| White | 194,552,774 | 69.1 | 585 | 52.4 |
| Black or African American | 33,947,837 | 12.1 | 226 | 20.3 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 2,068,883 | 0.7 | 11 | .01 |
| Asian | 10,131,188 | 3.6 | 118 | 10.6 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 345,489 | 0.1 | 1 | .00 |
| Hispanic or Latino | 35,305,818 | 12.5 | 124 | 11.1 |
| Two or More Races | 4,602,146 | 1.6 | 37 | 3.3 |
| Other | 467,770 | 0.2 | 14 | 1.3 |
| Total | 281,421,905 | 100 | 1116 | 100 |

Four minority groups (Black or African American, Asian, Two or More Races, and Other) out of the seven minority groups on *Sesame Street's* had a larger percentage than that specific United States minority percentage. In these categories, *Sesame Street* is

not only being racially sensitive by showing these minorities, but it is also being racially sensitive by allowing them to be higher than the national count.

Sesame Street did fall behind in three of the minority categories: American Indian and Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino. Although these differences did not appear to be large, the difference was statistically significant if we use the national population in proportion to the *Sesame Street* count. For example, the difference between the national count and *Sesame Street* for American Indian and Alaska Native was 2,040,740. This means that on *Sesame Street* nearly two million American Indians and Alaska Natives are “missing”. This is just to meet the numbers of the national population of this group.

The next group where *Sesame Street* did not meet the national distribution was the Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islander group. Again, by using the *Sesame Street* percent with the national average, the figures were as follows: *Sesame Street*’s Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders count is too small to measure, so small that it almost has no one representing this group. If the *Sesame Street* percentage of .00089 is placed on the national count the outcome is 250,465. Thus, 95,024 Native Hawaiian and Pacific Islanders would not exist in the United States if Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders had a percentage of .00089. That number is almost one third of the national count. *Sesame Street* needs to increase the number of Native Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders in order to be more racially conscious about this group.

Sesame Street also did not meet the United States population count with the Hispanic or Latino group. The percentage difference between the two was 1.4% representing approximately 4,067,987 Hispanics or Latinos. Therefore, if *Sesame Street*

was the real world, there would be over 4 million Hispanics/Latinos missing. There would need to be at least 140 or more individual characters within *Sesame Street* in order for it to meet the national count. Considering that this group is currently the largest minority and the fastest growing group, one would think that *Sesame Street* would be meeting this social change.

Therefore, the answer to the first research question was that *Sesame Street* did not represent the United States racial distribution. Overall, it can be argued that the *Sesame Street* count ranged from very good to very bad. The “very good” percentages were those in which minorities have been increased so that their portrayal is more frequent on television than in reality and at the same time following *Sesame Street’s* multicultural/diversity format. The “very bad” scores are the ones program producers need to increase in order to make programs that at least meet the national distribution for all races, if not one that shows an equal amount of race portrayals for all races. Ideally, it would be best if *Sesame Street* showed an accurate picture of reality by portraying the same population distribution as the United States, thus preparing children for reality. But, there is a second best option and that would be that the show portray an equal distribution of all races and promote equality and diversity. Both options are important and are challenges for *Sesame Street* to pursue as the United States enters a cultural revolution.

Research Question #2

The following question that I looked to answer with my content analysis regarded the portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino group. The question is stated next:

Q2. What is the portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino group, the fastest growing minority group in the United States, on *Sesame Street*?

The Hispanic/Latino group contained a total of 133 qualifying individual characters. This number included the nine (9) individual characters that fell under the “Two or More Races” category that were part Hispanic or Latino and another race. As mentioned before, groups, including Hispanic/Latino groups, were not coded for origin, gender, or setting.

The origin of the individuals in the Hispanic/Latino group was mostly “Unknown”. The amount of “Unknowns” consisted of 117 characters. This means that most Hispanic or Latinos represented on *Sesame Street* did not portray their language, culture, traditions, or customs. Only 16 (12%) of the 133 Hispanics/Latinos portrayed made it evident in some way that they belonged to a specific origin. The 12% that did not fall under the “Unknown” category was distributed as follows (see Table 4):

Table 4

Hispanic/Latino Origin and Individual of Group Cross-tabulation

| | | Individual or Group | Total |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|---------------------|-------|
| | | Individual | |
| Hispanic or Latino origin | Mexican | 8 | 8 |
| | Puerto Rican | 1 | 1 |
| | Cuban | 2 | 2 |
| | Central American | 2 | 2 |
| | Other Hispanic or Latino | 3 | 3 |
| | Unknown | 117 | 117 |
| Total | | 133 | 133 |

Therefore, the Mexican group consisted of 6%, Puerto Rican .75%, Cuban 1.5%, Central American 1.5%, and Other Hispanic or Latino 2.2% of the *Sesame Street* Hispanic/Latino population.

The clues that allowed the characters with evident origins to fall under these categories were very strong. For example, the Mexican group consisted of a few individuals at a birthday party in México celebrating the birthday of one of their peers. The Puerto Rican group was a little more difficult, but the dialect that a little girl used guided us to believe she spoke with a Puerto Rican accent. One Cuban that was portrayed was coded as Cuban also because of dialect. She used a colloquial word that originates in Cuba. The other Cuban was Gloria Estefan. There were two (2) Central Americans. The couple was making a Central American dish consisting of fried bananas. Finally, the “Other Hispanic or Latino” group portrayed Spain. Three of the main characters on *Sesame Street* vividly portrayed Spanish culture (from Spain) by singing, dancing, dressing and speaking Spanish.

As the study revealed, much of the cultural customs and traditions that portray Hispanics and Latinos were not evident on *Sesame Street*. This was a major difference from the way many, if not maybe the majority, of United States Hispanics or Latinos really live. Many United States Hispanics/Latinos choose to portray their culture and choose to stay in touch with their origins and roots whether it means maintaining their customs, the Spanish language, or the traditions. Under this analysis, *Sesame Street* portrayed Hispanics and Latinos only as images: images without depth.

Origin was also cross-tabulated with gender. The cross-tabulation analysis of Hispanic/Latino origin with Hispanic/Latino gender showed that females were more

distributed across the origin classifications than males. In other words, females had a representative in every origin, while males lacked characters of Puerto Rican and Cuban descent. Besides the “Unknown” origin category, Mexican males represented the second largest group of characters, consisting of six. Table 5 shows the distribution.

Table 5

Hispanic/Latino Origin and Hispanic/Latino Gender Cross-tabulation

| | Hispanic/Latino Gender | | | | | | Total |
|---------------------------|------------------------|---------|--------|---------|---------|---------|-------|
| | Male | Percent | Female | Percent | Unknown | Percent | |
| Hispanic or Latino Origin | | | | | | | |
| Mexican | 6 | 4.5 | 2 | 1.5 | - | - | 8 |
| Puerto Rican | - | - | 1 | .75 | - | - | 1 |
| Cuban | - | - | 2 | 1.5 | - | - | 2 |
| Central American | 1 | .75 | 1 | .75 | - | - | 2 |
| Other Hispanic or Latino | 1 | .75 | 2 | 1.5 | - | - | 3 |
| Unknown | 48 | 36.1 | 67 | 50.3 | 2 | 1.5 | 117 |
| Total | 56 | 42.1 | 75 | 56.3 | 2 | 1.5 | 133 |

Moving on to the analysis of the Hispanic/Latino gender (refer to Table 5); the frequencies showed that most Hispanics/Latinos were females. There were 75 females, consisting of 56% of the entire *Sesame Street* Hispanic/Latino population. There were 56 males. They consisted of 42% of the *Sesame Street* Hispanic/Latino population. There were only two (2) characters of Hispanic/Latino descent that were placed under the “Unknown” category. The difference between females and males is not too large and therefore it can only be said that Hispanic/Latino females were more apparent in

Sesame Street. This may be a production effort or may be chance. In any case it is good to see that Hispanic/Latino females do dominate the Hispanic/Latino population on *Sesame Street* because it shows that *Sesame Street* is making an effort to equalize the genders on television by increasing Hispanic/Latino female representation.

The setting in which Hispanics and Latinos appeared was also coded (see Table 6). The setting category was included in this content analysis as a guide to class classification. In other words, depending where the Hispanic/Latino character appeared, that setting portrayed a class and therefore the Hispanic/Latino character fell within that class.

Table 6

Setting of the Hispanic/Latino Group

| Setting | Hispanic/Latino N | Percent |
|--|----------------------|---------|
| Rural | 12 | 9.0 |
| Urban | 16 | 12.0 |
| Suburb | 2 | 1.5 |
| Child care, school, rec. center, library | 6 | 4.5 |
| Inside house | 13 | 9.8 |
| Outdoors <i>Sesame Street</i> | 32 | 24.0 |
| Indoors <i>Sesame Street</i> | 37 | 27.9 |
| Other | 10 | 7.5 |
| Unknown | 5 | 3.7 |
| Total | 133 | 100 |

The individual setting of “Indoors *Sesame Street*” held the largest number of Hispanics/Latinos (37; 28%). This meant that (using the definition and reasons described in the “Method” section above) nearly 28% of Hispanics/Latinos were

portrayed within the middle to high class. The setting with the next highest percentage was “Outdoor *Sesame Street*” with 32 characters, representing 24% of the total Hispanic/Latino population. This group was in the lower class. The “Suburb” category had the lowest number of characters. There were only two (2; 1.5%) Hispanics/Latinos in this category. Therefore, Hispanics/Latinos were portrayed in both extremes of the scale. They belonged to the middle to high class as well as the lower class.

By adding all the class categories that could be combined, for example adding all the neutral settings, the lower class settings, and the middle to high class settings, the results were as follows: For the neutral settings category there were 34 characters. They made up 25.5% of the Hispanic/Latino population. This group did not portray a class one way or the other. For the lower class settings, there were 60 (45%) characters. For the middle to high class settings, there were 39 characters or 29%. Thus, from this small-scale analysis, I concluded that Hispanics and Latinos on *Sesame Street* are portrayed as being of lower class stature.

Furthermore, I looked to see what the gender distribution was for the settings. (Table 7 illustrates the distribution). Males and females were distributed in all the settings. Only one setting lacked the female gender: “Suburb”. The males were distributed almost equally across the class classifications. In the neutral settings of “Child care, school, recreational center, library”; “Inside house”; “Other”; and “Unknown”, males totaled 16 or 29% of the male population. In the lower class, there were 18 or 32%; and in the middle to high class, 22 or 39% - all numbers relatively near each other. Males were mostly visible in the middle to high class.

The females were most apparent in the lower class settings. There were 42 (56%) female characters in this class. The neutral class held 16 females or 21.3% of the female Hispanic/Latino population. The middle to high class had 17 females or 22.6%

Table 7

Hispanic/Latino Setting with Hispanic/Latino Gender Cross-tabulation

| Setting | Male N | Percent | Female N | Percent | Unknown N | Percent | Total |
|---|-----------|---------|-------------|---------|--------------|---------|-------|
| Rural | 6 | 10.7 | 6 | 8.0 | - | - | 12 |
| Urban | 3 | 5.3 | 13 | 17.3 | - | - | 16 |
| Suburb | 2 | 3.6 | - | - | - | - | 2 |
| Child care, school, rec. center, library | 3 | 5.3 | 3 | 4.0 | - | - | 6 |
| Inside house | 2 | 3.6 | 9 | 12.0 | 2 | 100 | 13 |
| Outdoors <i>Sesame</i> <i>Street</i> | 9 | 16.0 | 23 | 30.6 | - | - | 32 |
| Indoors <i>Sesame</i> <i>Street</i> | 20 | 35.7 | 17 | 22.7 | - | - | 37 |
| Other | 9 | 16.0 | 1 | 1.3 | - | - | 10 |
| Unknown | 2 | 3.5 | 3 | 4.0 | - | - | 5 |
| Total | 56 | 100 | 75 | 100 | 2 | 100 | 133 |

of the Hispanic/Latino female population. The “Unknown” category only held two (2) characters. They were both placed in the neutral “Inside house” category. Their tally did not sway the distribution either way.

The majority of the male and female Hispanics/Latinos appeared mostly in the lower class settings. There were 60 (45%) of them in this class. Of those 60 Hispanic/Latino characters that appeared in the lower class settings, 42 (70% of the 60 characters) were females. This means that the image that is being reinforced to *Sesame Street* viewers is that Hispanic/Latino females are of lower class stature.

In the past, the media has portrayed Hispanics and Latinos in a negative light. Although this group is growing in numbers within the United States and achieving positively, many times the image the media continues to portray of the Hispanic/Latino population is still as negative as it was 50 years ago. In my investigation, I looked to uncover the implicit portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino population on *Sesame Street*. I concluded that Hispanics/Latinos are portrayed as individuals who do not actively practice their cultural customs and are mostly females of lower class stature. The latter finding shows that although females dominate the gender count, on *Sesame Street*, Hispanic/Latino females are still being displayed in a negative light.

The image of the Hispanic/Latino female can affect viewers of all ages. If an adult viewer repeatedly sees this type of portrayal, he or she may come to think that all Hispanic/Latino females are of lower class stature. Furthermore, he may bring to this female image all the negative aspects associated with being from a lower class. This thought may lead him or her to construe a negative image of all Hispanic/Latino females he encounters. A child watching this image may not associate much negative light to being from the lower class when a child, but later in life he may refer back to this image and prejudge all Hispanic/Latino females as only being from the lower class because that is what he learned. Lastly and more dangerous than the other examples is that a Hispanic/Latino female child may come to see this image as the norm and therefore, see it as her only aspiration. In other words, the image may set a goal standard for her. There is much more to television images than what one really cares to think, but it is very important to know that every message and image, especially those that are reinforced, are apt to have consequences.

Research Question #3

The portrayal of Mexicans, a group within the Hispanic/Latino race was also looked at within this study. The research question regarding this portrayal was stated as follows:

Q3. How are the people, human-looking animated characters or puppets of Mexican descent portrayed on *Sesame Street*?

There were a total of eight characters that explicitly showed they were of Mexican descent. Although this data consists of a small number, the Mexican group had the largest count in the Hispanic/Latino origin categories. This small number of characters is consistent with the research outcomes of Question #2: that very rarely do Hispanics/Latinos on *Sesame Street* reflect a cultural origin. The observations made for these eight Mexican characters on *Sesame Street* will be further described.

The Mexican group made up 6% of the Hispanic/Latino population and .5% of the total *Sesame Street* individual population. None of the eight characters were part of the “Two or More Races” category. Therefore, those in the Mexican group only portrayed Mexican characteristics. Some of these characteristics included an animated man in an *hacienda*, children breaking a *piñata* in México, and a boy speaking Spanish with a Northern México accent.

Of the eight characters, six were male and two were female. Two characters appeared in the “Rural” settings, three in the “Indoors *Sesame Street*” settings and the remaining three appeared in the “Unknown” setting category. The eight characters were placed in all three classes with the lower class having the least amount of characters.

It was difficult to make any major discussions about the portrayal of this group because of the small number. What was concluded about the Mexican group portrayal was that out of all the Hispanic/Latino origins, this group had the most obvious cultural appearance and that the small number of Mexican character portrayals supports the findings of Question #2: that Hispanics/Latinos on *Sesame Street* lack cultural depth to their images. There needs to be more explicit portrayals of Mexicans or of people of Mexican descent on *Sesame Street* because this is a group that is growing rapidly in the United States and producers should look to meet the consumer's needs. Thus, the third research question seems to highlight the argument that *Sesame Street* tends to reduce race/culture to a very flat dimension.

Other Notable Findings

After the content analysis was completed, an unexpected finding occurred. The finding concerns the group distribution. *Sesame Street* contained a total of 83 groups and 59 (71.1%) of them fell into the heterogeneous group, meaning that out of those groups, almost an overwhelming $\frac{3}{4}$ included two or more races within them (see Table 8). In this way, *Sesame Street* is being very socially conscious about the way it presents group interaction. It is showing that it is striving for "inclusion" as its mission states.

The vast inclusion of heterogeneous groups of people interacting could also mean that *Sesame Street* is trying to de-emphasize individual cultural differences and highlight what people have in common (or ignore the different cultural experiences/values that might complicate the issues that they do not want to

emphasize). If the latter is the case, there should be further investigation into what *Sesame Street* is really trying to teach and what its real mission is about.

Table 8
Race of Groups

| Race | Group N | Percent |
|---|------------|------------|
| HOMOGENOUS GROUPS | | |
| White | 7 | 8.4 |
| Black or African American | 5 | 6.0 |
| American Indian and Alaska Native | 0 | - |
| Asian | 2 | 2.4 |
| Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | 0 | - |
| Hispanic or Latino | 4 | 4.8 |
| Other | 0 | - |
| Unknown | 6 | 7.2 |
| HETEROGENOUS GROUPS | | |
| Two or More Race | 59 | 71.1 |
| Total | 83 | 100 |

The findings of the content analysis revealed some of the implicit messages that could not have been observed without this type of rigor. In doing this study, hopefully the findings will be used and incorporated to create programs of better value. The findings of the content analysis were next applied to the theoretical framework: hegemony theory.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION

Application of Hegemony Theory to Findings

In a discussion involving hegemony theory in relation to Sesame Workshop (the producer of *Sesame Street*) it is important to establish just how powerful and ubiquitous the producer is. First of all, Sesame Workshop has expanded from the simple 1960's children's educational program producer to a mass producer of media of all types. Sesame Workshop creates and sells books, magazines, videos, educational pamphlets, research reports, CD-ROMS, websites, and of course, a television show. The list only includes the media aspect, yet Sesame Workshop also distributes paraphernalia for children and adults, including clothes, shoes, blankets, toys, lunch boxes, stationery, *piñata* figures and much more. In addition, Sesame Workshop also has multiple versions of *Sesame Street* all over the world.

All of Sesame Workshop products bring the revenue back to the United States to fund research and produce educational materials. This revenue is well over the \$8,000,000 grant Sesame Workshop received in 1968 to create *Sesame Street*. As one can see, Sesame Workshop is widespread and holds much power.

Sesame Street is practically available to every home in the United States. When it is televised, it shows images of furry, stuffed animals and monsters, unforgettable puppets and its various groups of people as they interact and try to teach prosocial and

educational skills to viewers. The images of the people were the ones that were analyzed in this project in order to decipher the hegemony that may exist over them.

From the outcomes of the content analysis, the dominant ideology that was portrayed was that the world is full of different-looking people. They range from dark skin to very light skin. Yet, the distribution of these people and groups was not evenly divided among the racial groups portrayed, nor was it an accurate portrayal of reality. Therefore, even though Sesame Workshop encourages and advertises inclusion and acceptance of all races, Whites still made up the dominant race and the minority portrayals were few. In the month that was analyzed, the dominant ideology that was distributed to viewers across the country was that even though *Sesame Street* accepts minorities, Whites are still even more so accepted and included than any other racial group.

I'm speculating this worldview is similar to the one general television portrays and this type of worldview requires further study on *Sesame Street* - especially because *Sesame Street* wants to portray a program full of "inclusion and acceptance" (Sesame Workshop Mission, 2002). If it wants to follow through with that mission, it should look to make a month's worth of programming where Blacks or American Indians or any other minority group is portrayed as the majority. If a month's worth is too large of a task, maybe just an episode would be a fine start. This is a challenge for a program that prides itself on diversity.

In my study, Hispanics/Latinos appeared in very small numbers. They only made up 10% of the entire individual/group population. In the United States the Hispanic/Latino population consists of 12.5% of the population. Although the

difference doesn't seem to be large in percentages, in individual numbers the difference is significant. If the United States only had a Hispanic/Latino population of 10%, over 4 million Hispanics/Latinos would be missing. The Screen Actors Guild (2000) showed that Hispanics/Latinos are underrepresented on television, but the question that is posed here is: Why isn't this number challenged? Why don't Hispanics/Latinos fight to get more representation in the media? Or a question more specific to this analysis is: Why don't Hispanic/Latino audiences question Sesame Workshop for having low Hispanic/Latino portrayals? The answer to the last question could lie in what the Italian scholar, Antonio Gramsci, called hegemony theory.

There exists a hegemony over Hispanic/Latino viewers of *Sesame Street*. This hegemony originates from Sesame Workshop. Sesame Workshop delivers *Sesame Street* through PBS. The program is readily accessible on television and free of charge to its viewers. Sesame Workshop producers deliver through *Sesame Street* their desires, their vision, their beliefs, basically their ideology (a practice that consciously or subconsciously underlies most media outlets) to the Hispanic/Latino viewers. On *Sesame Street* these desires may be that children of all races and backgrounds learn the United States alphabet; their vision may be that all children get along, learn to share and everyone accepts each other no matter what their skin color is; their beliefs may be that all United States residents celebrate United States holidays the American way. Overall, these portrayals form part of an ideology.

Consequently, this ideology is dispersed onto the Hispanic/Latino viewers as the status quo - as what is correct and socially acceptable. Gramsci would describe this

practice as the part of a hegemony where the intellectuals instill onto the subordinate groups their beliefs in a courteous and gentle way.

Now, Sesame Workshop feels that the Hispanic/Latino truly needs this type of programming because they need to learn the alphabet. They need to learn all the lessons that will prepare them for school, so that they can enter at the same educational level as other children who will be entering kindergarten. And finally, the Hispanic/Latino needs to learn the American culture. Sesame Workshop may even want to influence the viewers so that in the future, after much exposure to *Sesame Street*, the viewers will become what they believe to be a productive citizen of this country. This is the beginning of a hegemony.

On the other hand, the Hispanics/Latinos take in the programming consensually because it is entertaining and insightful. Thus, Sesame Workshop “asks” Hispanics and Latinos to take in their ideas, Hispanics/Latinos agree because they are getting something in return: they are receiving entertainment, educational lessons and achievement upon entering kindergarten. Furthermore, because Hispanics/Latinos are receiving benefits through the program, they in turn watch the program even more and all the while, Sesame Workshop, the *intellectuals*, dominate and have the power because their ideology is being distributed and accepted. Also, after frequent viewing, audiences then want additional paraphernalia associated with *Sesame Street*. The consumption of the paraphernalia brings revenue to Sesame Workshop, which then uses the revenue to continue the power through consent relationship. Thus, the hegemony is completed.

In order to make the Sesame Workshop and Hispanic/Latino viewer power through consent relationship more clear, a parallel example, which applies in society, will be described. For example, a grocery store with a Hispanic/Latino dominated employee population will have employees playing Spanish music in the *bodega* (warehouse) of the store, speaking Spanish or performing other actions that mirror their culture, yet, when they come out into the actual store, they do not portray those customs. The employer, the store owner- the *intellectual*, has a hegemony over them that does not allow them to act out their culture as they do behind closed doors. The hegemony over the employee is never applied through force, though; it is consensually obeyed. The Hispanic/Latino employee obeys the ideology because he or she needs the job, therefore will consensually accept the ideology in order to keep that job.

Sesame Workshop also at no point uses force to get Hispanics or Latinos to watch the show or follow their ideology. Sesame Workshop just gives the Hispanics/Latinos something they want or as Gramsci would say, *a reward*- a program that every so often portrays them (as the content analysis showed), illustrates their language (through the Spanish word of the day), teaches them (through the daily educational lessons), and entertains them (with the creative storylines). Of course, this reason is not all inclusive, but it does demonstrate a theoretical approach to why Hispanics/Latinos may not question Sesame Workshop about the low numbers of Hispanic/Latino portrayals. This hegemonic example explains why *Sesame Street* is not “overthrown” for not including Hispanics/Latinos as often as it should and for portraying females as being of lower class stature.

The hegemony which *Sesame Street* holds over minority children of Mexican descent can also be illustrated with the Hispanic/Latino example. As was stated earlier, people of Mexican descent fall into the Hispanic/Latino race, therefore the theoretical reason above also explains how Sesame Workshop may hold a hegemony over those of Mexican descent. Yet, when dealing with the Mexican group and *Sesame Street*, one further element is added to the relationship. That element is the element of implications. Adults and children of Mexican descent, but more specifically the children, who buy into *Sesame Street* may also have to deal with the implication of an identity crisis. In this case, Sesame Workshop's influence has an unexpected, maybe unintended, effect on children of Mexican descent. The following section addresses these implications.

Identity Concerns

Identity is created by our culture and later in life, by other social influences. A child, though, is still quite at the mercy of the socialization that comes from the family; especially a Hispanic/Latino child of Mexican background (from now on will be referred to as "the child", "he" or "she"). The hypothetical child that I refer to in this section is one that resides in the United States, but that receives Mexican cultural influences through his immediate family, community, or when he visits other family members that practice the Mexican culture. This child is also bilingual. The child of Mexican descent was chosen as the focus for the implications of this hegemony for the same reason that the Mexican group was chosen as a focus for the content analysis. That reason is: the Mexican population is the largest within the Hispanic/Latino group.

Up to this point in his life, this child is basically just his name. He has not yet picked up other titles that give him any identification such as “singer” or “artist”. But when this child watches *Sesame Street*, a program which might not reflect him or his cultural customs, his active mind will try to decide what this all means.

On *Sesame Street* some of this questioning will begin for the child of Mexican descent when he is exposed to images that contradict his own lifestyle. My content analysis revealed that Mexican cultural practices and customs were rarely shown. There were only 8 clearly depicted Mexicans out of the 133 Hispanics/Latinos. The rest of the 117 characters that may have been Mexican fell into the “Unknown” category because they did not portray any actions that affiliated them with the Mexican group or any other group for that matter. This portrayal of Mexicans is a difference from what many people of Mexican descent really do: act out their cultural roots (Moore & Pachon, 1976). When a child of Mexican descent sees these Hispanics/Latinos that look like him, but do not act like he does or they don’t perform the actions for situations as he thinks they will, he may feel confused because what he is witnessing is a contradiction for what he knows: that the children who look like him do not follow their traditions and customs.

The child of Mexican descent living in the United States may also be bilingual (Moore & Pachon, 1976, p. 122-123). If he is bilingual, he may also wonder why the “Spanish Word of the Day” lesson on *Sesame Street* only includes one word and not a conversation. Another question that might be posed by the child is “I speak English and Spanish, so why isn’t there an “English Word of the Day?” And if the child already knows the “Spanish Word of the Day”, he may see this segment as elementary.

Sesame Street also strays from a strong cultural teaching that the child of Mexican descent is taught at a very young age. That teaching is that everyone should have an outmost respect towards people older than him/herself, especially the elderly (Gangotena, 1997). On *Sesame Street*, older people, older puppets and old animated characters are often portrayed as ridiculous or as objects of humor. Mr. Noodle, the older gentleman on *Sesame Street*, who is portrayed with the mental capabilities of a 3-5 year old (maybe less), is always portrayed as unwise and comical. He is supposed to be the target of his humorous actions, but a child of Mexican descent who has been raised with a strong Mexican influence of respecting elders could be baffled by the portrayal because he would never laugh at his grandmother or any older person (Anaya, 2002). He would honor these people, not see them as fools.

Another Mexican tradition that conflicts with the images portrayed on *Sesame Street* is that of the family. For Mexicans and children of Mexican descent that actively practice their Mexican culture, family is the most important unit of their life (Gangotena, 1997; Moore & Pachon, 1976). For example, many live at home until they marry, then they don't move too far away from their parents because they want to be able to take care of them in old age, they are dependent on each other and rely on each other. This applies not just to the immediate family, but to the extended family as well. They are what Gudykunst (1995) would call a collectivist culture. On the other hand, on *Sesame Street* none of the principle actors belong to a family. They know each other, occasionally spend time with each other when teaching a lesson, but never just enjoy each other's presence, nor do they go home to each other at the end of the show. Rarely do they ever display familial affection towards each other. Thus, this widens the

gap of differences between *Sesame Street* and the upbringings of United States children of Mexican descent.

Daily interaction is also a strong characteristic of the Mexican family (Gangotena, 1997). For example, dinner is complete only if everyone is relating something so that interaction occurs. Also, when a child goes somewhere it is generally common for the mother or father to ask where the child will be going, what she or he will be doing and with whom she or he is going. Contrary to what many people may think, the child is usually more than willing to answer the parent. When the child returns, she is usually also willing to share her experience.

This daily interaction is not merely a characteristic of the Mexican family; it also extends out into the community of Mexican descent. In a doctor's waiting room, in a post office, at the market, people will warmly greet each other and converse for a few moments even with strangers. On *Sesame Street*, Gina, the veterinarian, has a waiting room in her clinic. The waiting room usually has people who keep to themselves, read the newspaper and sit quietly. In the post office, people go in, greet Maria, obtain what they need and leave never acknowledging others in the area unless they have met previously. This example provides another substantial difference between Mexican culture and *Sesame Street* portrayals.

After a child of Mexican descent watches a program like *Sesame Street* (which in one month includes people who look like her 10% of the time and shows her in ways which don't necessarily reflect her way of life) she may either want to change her identity to act and be like the characters on *Sesame Street* (assimilate), or she may feel excluded from it all because she doesn't identify or fit in with those images

(marginalized). She may also translate those portrayals in two ways: 1) ways to act in the world when confronted with similar people and situations similar to the ones portrayed in *Sesame Street* and 2) ways to balance actions in number 1) with her actions when she is with people who do act and look like her. This balancing act between two sets of behaviors is described as biculturalism.

Tan, Fujioka, Bautista, Maldonado, Tan, and Wright (2000) found that principle influences of Hispanic/Latino youth [this would include youth of Mexican descent,] included not only family, school, and peers, but also mass media (p. 110). Because Hispanic/Latino children do watch so much TV, more than the average United States household for daytime and primetime television (Nielsen, 2001a; Nielsen, 2001b) or more specifically, at least four hours a day (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001, p. 311), the “accumulated experience contributes to the cultivation of a child’s values, beliefs, dreams and expectations, which shape the adult identity a child will carry and modify throughout his or her life” (Huntemann & Morgan, 2001, p. 311).

A child who watches so much television is at the mercy of the images that abound on television and will use these views as points of reference when thinking about related issues. This influence may lead a child of Mexican descent to want to change his identity. He will learn to think of those television images as the “appropriate attitudes and behaviors . . . of the host culture” (Tan et al., 2000, p. 114). He may begin to believe the rewards (Tan et al., 2000, p. 115) associated with being part of mainstream culture and find the sources attractive (DeFleur & Ball-Rockeach, 1989, p. 216), thus concluding that he wants to invoke these ways on himself. In other words, he may want to assimilate. In assimilating, the child will begin to act and try to look like

those portrayed on the television program. He may want to wear only those clothes that are worn by those on the television, use the same trends, eliminate his association to his culture and maybe even decide not to speak Spanish, anymore. In assimilating, the child is erasing one of the most important aspects of his identity: his culture.

The Mexican child may not want to assimilate, though. Maybe she doesn't see any "rewards" or "attractive sources" coming from these images on *Sesame Street*. Maybe she just cannot and does not want to try to identify with the television images and openly rejects them. Yet, this action might be problematic to a child because in choosing to keep her roots, she is "confirming the exclusion" (Fox-Genovese, 1990, p. 24) of her culture. In other words, in celebrating her ethnicity, her actions "amount to a reinforcement of marginalization" (Fox-Genovese, 1990, p. 24). She may try to assimilate, try to become 'one of them', but being there realizes that it is all wrong and feels as if she doesn't belong (Dunne, 2000, p. 79). This, in turn, promotes a feeling of low self-esteem because she can't imitate (Gibbs Staff, 2002, p. 2) or fit in with mainstream. Further, when she does find herself trying to be a part of the status quo, she is only seen by others as "irrelevant and exotic . . . pointless and meaningless [, as if she is] lacking sense, lacking judgment" (Lugones & Price, 1995, p. 104).

A third scenario that can occur is that the child begins to accept and practice two ways of life: mainstream and the Mexican culture. This practice is called being bicultural. Biculturalism allows for a child to be able to feel, understand, and include two cultures within his identity, language and behaviors. Thus, the child will behave according to the situation. The child's identity will be able to reflect both cultures and although he may feel marginalized through society, his own identity and sense of self

will not be marginalized because he is including both lifestyles in his way of living.

This is just another way that television can influence a child's identity.

All three scenarios depict issues that a child who has strong ties to her Mexican culture could face when being an avid viewer of United States television images that contradict her way of life. In one way or another, they all can lead to marginalization. Marginalization is associated with the term "outsider". It is also an image that is pervasively shown on United States television which rarely portrays Hispanic/Latino minorities, their culture or their values.

The argument in this discussion is that a Mexican child's identity can be influenced by television in the direction of assimilation, rejection or biculturalism, all which can possibly create within the child doubts, low self-esteem and a confused identity. Yet, television programs like *Sesame Street*, have the potential to teach a child another way of living different than his own, but nonetheless worthy of knowing. Orozco (1999) writes that the minority viewer does not need to choose between one culture or the other (p. 119). There is such a thing as a middle ground. A child does not need to assimilate. They also don't have to reject the dominating images and activities coming from the television programs. They can actually embrace them as long as they can also embrace their own ethnic identity.

Sesame Street has the potential to do many things. In doing them, though, it should be aware of the negative and positive impacts of those procedures. As was described in the above situation, *Sesame Street* could do harm or actually do wonders for a child. Overall, the show should be careful in its mission to teach children because one does not know which way a child will turn in trying to form his identity.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, LIMITATIONS, FUTURE RESEARCH, AND CONCLUSION

Summary

Children and television form a unique relationship. This relationship stems mainly from the creative techniques television uses to get a child's attention and from the amount of hours of television a child watches. A child watches an average of four hours of television a day and in a week-long period watches more hours than the amount of time he spends in school. Children's educational television programming is especially known to have a special relationship with children because these shows use specific techniques to capture a child's attention.

Currently, children's shows tend to be full of educational value and/or skill-related plots. One of these shows is *Sesame Street*, which has been publicly broadcast for over 30 years. Throughout this time the show has never failed to include educational lessons in its script. *Sesame Street* has also been the focus of much research, but most of the research done has been on the educational lessons it has offered children and not on the images it portrays.

Such images as race, ethnicity, gender, and class had not been addressed. As a beginning scholar in the field of communication with an interest in children's educational television, I analyzed specific images on *Sesame Street*. I analyzed the

portrayals of Hispanics/Latinos and Mexicans to uncover implicit messages. In order to uncover these messages, I posed the following research questions:

Q1. Do racial groups on *Sesame Street* represent the distribution of the United States population?

Q2. What is the portrayal of the Hispanic/Latino group, the fastest growing minority group in the United States, on *Sesame Street*?

Q3. How are the people, human-looking animated characters or puppets of Mexican descent portrayed on *Sesame Street*?

The questions were answered by way of a content analysis. Tally sheets were constructed and 20 hours of *Sesame Street* programs were coded by two people. The content analysis performed herein revealed many interesting results about *Sesame Street*, a program that prides itself on “diversity and inclusion”.

The results for Question #1 were as follows: Racial groups on *Sesame Street* do not represent the distribution of the United States population. It appears that *Sesame Street* reduced the images of Whites to increase the images of minorities. Four minority groups (Black or African American, Asian, Two or More Races, and Other) had a larger percentage of images than the national percentage. On the other hand, though, American Indian, Alaska Native, Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander, and Hispanic or Latino all had a smaller percentages on *Sesame Street* than the national percentage. The content analysis revealed that the people, human-looking animated characters or puppets did not portray the distribution of races within the United States. From the outcomes of this study, it can be argued that *Sesame Street* does not show an accurate depiction of reality to its viewers.

The second research question dealt with the portrayals of the Hispanic/Latino group on *Sesame Street*. The results showed that the race did not actively participate in their cultural customs, whether it was the use of the Spanish language, attire, or traditions. This was a major difference from the way many, maybe the majority, of United States Hispanics/Latinos really live by choosing to stay in touch with their origins and roots and maintaining their customs, the Spanish language, or traditions. *Sesame Street* portrayed Hispanics/Latinos as images without cultural depth and again, the argument is made that *Sesame Street* does not show a realistic representation of reality.

Another result showed that at least one Hispanic/Latino female belonged to every Hispanic/Latino origin, but males lacked a representative in the Puerto Rican and Cuban origins categories. There were also more Hispanic/Latino females than males. As far as the socioeconomic classification, this small-scale analysis revealed that Hispanics/Latinos on *Sesame Street* are usually portrayed as lower class citizens. Females were more apparently placed in lower class settings than males.

The third question regarded the portrayal of the Mexican group on *Sesame Street*. Only eight characters on *Sesame Street* showed actions that clearly placed them in the Mexican origin category. The Mexican group had the largest number of characters in the origin identification categories. Although this number was small, the data supported the findings for Question #2: that Hispanics/Latinos on *Sesame Street* rarely reflect their cultural customs.

The content analysis also revealed that when groups (as defined in the “Method” section as being “six or more people interacting”) were shown, they were shown as

mixed race groups. In other words, the majority of the groups portrayed were not made up of only one race. This outcome showed that *Sesame Street* is striving to promote the “inclusion” its mission states.

After the content analysis was performed, the outcomes were related to hegemony theory. Hegemony theory is a way in which to study popular culture and ideology (Sassoon, 2000, p. 15) and to show how power and leadership occurs through consent. In this scenario, hegemony theory showed how Sesame Workshop, the creator of *Sesame Street*, holds power over Hispanics/Latinos without the use of force, but with their consent. There was an evident hegemony in terms of values and portrayals that originated at the point of the producers of the show and were dispersed onto Hispanic/Latino viewers as what is socially acceptable and correct.

The hegemony begins with Sesame Workshop when they broadcast their show, *Sesame Street*. Sesame Workshop’s ideology is transferred to Hispanic/Latino viewers through their show as being the status quo or as what is correct and socially acceptable behavior. Sesame Workshop assumes Hispanic/Latino viewers need this programming because it will help them learn lessons that will prepare them for a United States education and so they continue to instill and disperse the ideology. Hispanics/Latinos take in and accept the programming (consent), which contains the ideology because it gives them a “reward”. This reward is in the form of the entertainment and insight that they receive when they watch the show.

Watching the show allows Hispanics/Latinos to take in the ideology without force and use it to guide their lives according to Sesame Workshop teachings. In other words, audiences live according to the influential ideology which is instilled by *Sesame*

Street and comes from the people who create *Sesame Street*. One of these influences is to buy and seek more *Sesame Street* paraphernalia, which in turn gives Sesame Workshop more revenue to create more *Sesame Street* programs and other related media (power). This may explain why Hispanic/Latino viewers continue to watch *Sesame Street* in spite of the fact that they are rarely and inaccurately portrayed. This is only a theoretical analysis and should not be seen as a definite answer for the occurrence of this situation, but it is one that helps understand this relationship.

My study described some of the contradictions between *Sesame Street* ideology and Mexican ideology. It also described some of the implications that could arise in children of Mexican descent by watching images and actions on *Sesame Street* that may contradict his or her upbringing. For example, programming can cause the child to struggle between assimilating with mainstream culture and the ideology that is portrayed. The child may choose to give up their own culture and take up mainstream customs, or the child may want to totally reject dominant culture and simply embrace their own, becoming monocultural. The child may also learn to be bicultural and behave and use customs according to the situation in which he finds himself.

These are some of the implications that may impact a child of Mexican descent and that may give rise to an identity crisis within this type of child. The argument here is that a Mexican child's identity can be influenced by television in the direction of assimilation, or rejection, creating within the child doubts, low self-esteem and confused identity. Yet, it is possible that a child can learn to live in two cultures and embrace them both, if the child is taught how to do so. These implications may also apply to other minority groups (African American, Asian American, Native American,

etc.) and studies focusing on these groups may be valuable in confirming or disconfirming the conclusions and implications of this study. Further study is needed to discover what happens to the identity of children of Mexican descent or other minorities when they watch programming that contradicts their upbringing.

This study showed that a sample children's educational television program did carry some of the same customs of excluding racial minorities or portraying them in a negative light as general television has done in the past. The results of this study can add new knowledge not only to studies that concern the portrayals of racial groups on children's entertainment television, but also to the large amount of research that has counted and analyzed race portrayals on general television programming. The results and focus on Hispanics/Latinos and Mexicans will also contribute to knowledge about Hispanics/Latinos in the media.

Limitations

Throughout the process of my research, I came across some ideas that I would have liked to have included in my study. Some of these ideas could have made my study stronger, but time constraints and funding did not permit their use. The following are a few:

First, increasing the sample size to maybe six month's worth of shows could have made the study more reliable. This amount is an extensive amount of data and some of the images may have been repetitive, but the repetition would not have affected the accuracy of the study because the exposure of what is being shown to viewers is the

importance in a study like this one. Yet, that amount of data was not an attainable goal because of time constraints and lack of funding.

Adding another coder, more specifically a coder of another Hispanic/Latino origin than that of the original two coders, may have also aided in the content analysis of this project. This coder may have added some insight when coming to a consensus about the classification of origin for the characters.

Still another limitation of the study was that it didn't take into account that maybe certain racial groups on *Sesame Street* were smaller than the national average because of the choice of settings Sesame Workshop chooses to portray. Maybe Sesame Workshop doesn't show images of places where those racial groups reside because of lack of funding, lack of permission to film in those settings or because *Sesame Street's* focus is in an urban studio setting. That would ultimately lower the count of certain races in an unintentional way. In comparing the race distribution with the United States, the study failed to take into account the geographic distribution of United States population.

These limitations are few, but ones that should be noted because of the possible changes they could have made on the results of the study if they had been addressed.

Future Research

In the course of analyzing 20 hours of *Sesame Street* one will be able to spot trends or patterns (especially when the shows are being watched one right after the other) that could be used for future research. The following are a few:

One of my observations while doing this study was that Asian Americans almost always wore yellow or were portrayed with backgrounds that were completely yellow. That made me wonder if the color worn by each race or surrounding a certain race was the color that is usually known to represent that race. For example, brown is usually known to represent Hispanics and Latinos, so would they be wearing brown most of the time? Or would African Americans wear black and be shown in dark settings? That investigation could reveal some meaningful results about racial portrayals on *Sesame Street*.

Also, in order to have the study relate to other gender studies, the addition of a gender category for all the individuals portrayed could also be applied. This could reveal some interesting facts about the gender distribution on *Sesame Street*. Just like a comparison was made with the United States population, a comparison of the gender distribution between *Sesame Street* and the United States could also be done.

Now that the portrayals of the Hispanic/Latino group have been revealed, this study could take a step further and do some investigations to find out if the Hispanic/Latino portrayal on *Sesame Street* is accurate. In other words, the demographics for Hispanic/Latino females could be checked with the United States Census and see if Hispanic/Latino females in the United States are of lower class standing and don't portray their culture in their daily lives. This action would reveal some important information to the current research and show if *Sesame Street* is preparing its viewers for reality.

Lastly, the segments within *Sesame Street* ("Opening Scene", "Monster Time", "Journey to Ernie", and "Elmo's World" etc.) could be analyzed to see what the racial

count is for each. This idea would still go along with the current racial count on *Sesame Street*, but now the segments would be broken down to see what race is portrayed more frequent or less frequent in each segment. Genders could also be coded for how many times they appear in each segment. These are all ideas that should be pursued in order to uncover more implicit messages that may exist in this well-known children's educational television program.

Conclusion

My research contributes to an area within the communication field that has not been widely studied, especially with regard to Hispanics/Latinos and Mexican portrayals. Children's television program producers, children's television experts, caregivers, and providers would find these results useful and interesting. There is much more to be analyzed within *Sesame Street*, but for the meantime, the current study has given rise to useful results. Future research should be performed in order to better understand children's educational television and know what effects can occur when minority children watch children's educational television.

United States children's television programming requires constant overseeing. Hispanic/Latino child viewers or other minority viewers cannot just be shown one-sided values. There needs to be a wider range of programming that shows various cultures, their languages and their specific traditions. Furthermore, cultures need to be portrayed as they really are and not in stereotypic ways. The current trend of children's programming may cause minority viewers to become confused. This seems to me to be unnecessary for young viewers to go through because of the ethical concern of whether

children should have to go through such identity questioning and confusion at such a young age because producers refuse to or cannot understand the importance of portraying diverse cultures and values. This is especially true given the diversity of United States citizens. Children's television needs to take on a different approach, but only by way of in depth inquiry can change begin to happen.

APPENDIX I

CONTENT ANALYSIS INFORMATION

Tally Sheets

Categories and Codes List

SPSS Program Set-Up

Tally Sheet/ Part 1

| Program Date: 4/15/02 I.D.#: 3981 Video #: Show #: | | Race (Individuals) | | | | | Race (Individuals) | | | | | Race (Groups) | | | | |
|--|----------------------|--------------------|---------------------------|-----------------------------------|-------|--|--------------------|-------------------|-------|---------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|---------------------|-----------------------|---|
| Segment | Character | White | Black or African American | American Indian and Alaska Native | Asian | Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander | Hispanic or Latino | Two or More Races | Other | Unknown | Indeterminate Group | Indeterminate Group | Indeterminate Group | Indeterminate Group | Unknown Race or Group | 3 |
| Counting segment | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 1 boy yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 2 boy yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 3 boy yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 4 boy green | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 5 girl yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 6 girl yellow | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 7 girl yellow #1 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 8 girl yellow #2 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 9 girl yellow #3 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 10 girl yellow #4 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 11 girl yellow #5 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 12 girl yellow #6 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 13 girl yellow #7 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 14 girl yellow #8 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 15 girl yellow #9 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 16 girl yellow #10 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 17 girl yellow #11 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 18 girl yellow #12 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 19 girl yellow #13 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 20 girl yellow #14 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 21 girl yellow #15 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 22 girl yellow #16 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 23 girl yellow #17 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 24 girl yellow #18 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 25 girl yellow #19 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 26 girl yellow #20 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 27 girl yellow #21 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 28 girl yellow #22 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 29 girl yellow #23 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 30 girl yellow #24 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 31 girl yellow #25 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 32 girl yellow #26 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 33 girl yellow #27 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 34 girl yellow #28 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 35 girl yellow #29 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 36 girl yellow #30 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 37 girl yellow #31 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 38 girl yellow #32 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 39 girl yellow #33 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 40 girl yellow #34 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 41 girl yellow #35 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 42 girl yellow #36 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 43 girl yellow #37 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 44 girl yellow #38 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 45 girl yellow #39 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 46 girl yellow #40 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 47 girl yellow #41 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 48 girl yellow #42 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 49 girl yellow #43 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 50 girl yellow #44 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 51 girl yellow #45 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 52 girl yellow #46 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 53 girl yellow #47 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 54 girl yellow #48 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 55 girl yellow #49 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 56 girl yellow #50 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 57 girl yellow #51 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 58 girl yellow #52 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 59 girl yellow #53 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 60 girl yellow #54 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 61 girl yellow #55 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 62 girl yellow #56 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 63 girl yellow #57 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 64 girl yellow #58 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 65 girl yellow #59 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 66 girl yellow #60 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 67 girl yellow #61 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 68 girl yellow #62 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 69 girl yellow #63 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 70 girl yellow #64 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 71 girl yellow #65 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 72 girl yellow #66 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 73 girl yellow #67 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 74 girl yellow #68 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 75 girl yellow #69 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 76 girl yellow #70 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 77 girl yellow #71 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 78 girl yellow #72 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 79 girl yellow #73 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 80 girl yellow #74 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 81 girl yellow #75 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 82 girl yellow #76 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 83 girl yellow #77 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 84 girl yellow #78 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 85 girl yellow #79 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 86 girl yellow #80 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 87 girl yellow #81 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 88 girl yellow #82 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 89 girl yellow #83 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 90 girl yellow #84 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 91 girl yellow #85 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 92 girl yellow #86 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 93 girl yellow #87 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 94 girl yellow #88 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 95 girl yellow #89 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 96 girl yellow #90 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 97 girl yellow #91 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 98 girl yellow #92 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 99 girl yellow #93 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 100 girl yellow #94 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 101 girl yellow #95 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 102 girl yellow #96 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 103 girl yellow #97 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 104 girl yellow #98 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 105 girl yellow #99 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
| | 106 girl yellow #100 | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |

Tally Sheet/ Part 2

[illegible]

Categories and Codes List

Race (Individuals):

White = 1

Black or African American = 2

American Indian and Alaska Native = 3

Asian = 4

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander = 5

Hispanic or Latino = 6

Two or more races = 7

Other = 8

Unknown = 9

(Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000)

Race (Groups):

Heterogeneous Groups = 1

Homogenous Groups = 2

Race of Homogenous Group = 1 – 9

Unknown Race of Group = 3

Hispanic or Latino Origin:

Mexican = 1

Puerto Rican = 2

Cuban = 3

Central American = 4

Other Hispanic or Latino = 5

Two origins = 6

Unknown = 7

(Source: United States Census Bureau, Census 2000)

Hispanic or Latino Gender:

Male = 1

Female = 2

Unknown = 3

Hispanic or Latino Setting:

Rural = 1

Urban = 2

Suburb = 3

Child care, school, recreational center = 4

Inside house = 5

Outdoors *Sesame Street* = 6

Indoors *Sesame Street* = 7

Other = 8

Unknown = 9

SPSS Program Set-up

| | Name | Type | Width | Decimals | Label |
|---|----------|---------|-------|----------|---|
| 1 | entity | String | 8 | 0 | Individual or Group |
| 2 | race | Numeric | 8 | 0 | Race of Character |
| 3 | twomore | Numeric | 8 | 0 | Two or More Races w/ Hispanic/Latino Background |
| 4 | horigin | Numeric | 8 | 0 | Hispanic/Latino origin |
| 5 | hgender | String | 8 | 0 | Hispanic/Latino gender |
| 6 | hsetting | Numeric | 8 | 0 | Hispanic/Latino setting |

| | Values | Missing | Columns | Align | Measure |
|---|--------|---------|---------|-------|---------|
| 1 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |
| 2 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |
| 3 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |
| 4 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |
| 5 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |
| 6 | * | None | 8 | Right | Nominal |

* 1. Individual = i

Group = g

* 2. White = 1

Black or African American = 2

American Indian and Alaska Native = 3

Asian = 4

Native Hawaiian and Other Pacific Islander = 5

Hispanic or Latino = 6

Two or more races = 7

Other = 8

Unknown = 9

*** 3. Hispanic Background = 1**

No Hispanic Background = 2

*** 4. Mexican = 1**

Puerto Rican = 2

Cuban = 3

Central American = 4

Other Hispanic or Latino = 5

Two origins = 6

Unknown = 7

*** 5. Male = 1**

Female = 2

Unknown = 3

* 6. Rural = 1

Urban = 2

Suburb = 3

Child care, school, recreational center = 4

Inside house = 5

Outdoors *Sesame Street* = 6

Indoors *Sesame Street* = 7

Other = 8

Unknown = 9

APPENDIX II

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APPENDIX III

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If you have any questions about this matter, please feel free to contact me at (760) 333-8154 or Dr. Barlow at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (she is in charge of thesis policies) at (702) 895-4392. Thank you so much for your help. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,



Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa St.
Coachella, CA 92236-2630
(760) 333-8154

October 9, 2002

Sage Publications, Inc.
2455 Teller Road
Thousand Oaks, CA 91320

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Sincerely,



Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa St.
Coachella, CA 92236-2630
(760) 333-8154

October 9, 2002

Publishers
Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.
10 Industrial Avenue
Mahwah, NJ 07430

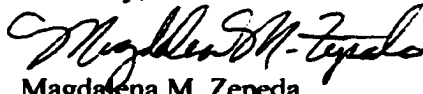
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Sincerely,



Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa St.
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(760) 333-8154

October 9, 2002

Praeger Publishers
CBS Educational and Professional Publishing
521 Fifth Avenue
New York, NY 10175

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Sincerely,



Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa St.
Coachella, CA 92236-2630
(760) 333-8154

October 9, 2002

Copyright and Permission Specialist
Duke University Press
905 West Main St.
Suite 18B
Durham, NC 27701

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Sincerely,



Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa St.
Coachella, CA 92236-2630
(760) 333-8154

October 9, 2002

University of Minnesota Press
2037 University Avenue Southeast
Minneapolis, MN 55414

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Magdalena M. Zepeda
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Coachella, CA 92236-2630
(760) 333-8154

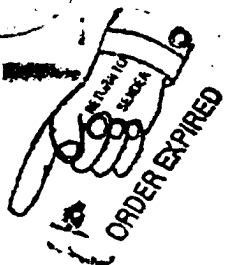
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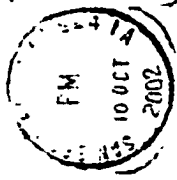
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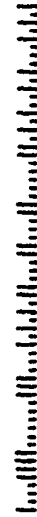
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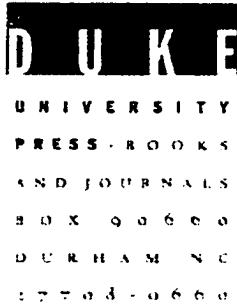
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APPENDIX V

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS/ PERMISSION TO QUOTE



16 October, 2002

Ms. Magdalena M. Zepeda
51-962 Genoa Street
Coachella, CA 92236-2630

Re: your masters thesis – permissions request

Dear Ms. Zepeda:

In reply to your request of October 9, 2002, Duke University Press is pleased to grant you permission to reprint excerpts from Heather Hendershot's, "Sesame Street: Cognition & Communications Imperialism," appearing in *Kids Media Culture*, edited by Marsha Kinder in your forthcoming Master of Arts thesis.

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Please advise if you have any questions. Your courtesies are appreciated.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "T. Robinson".

Thomas A. Robinson
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Telephone: 919.687.3616
E-Mail: trobinson@dukeupress.edu

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Unveiling the Implicit Message: A Look at Racial, Hispanic/Latino and Mexican Portrayals on *Sesame Street*

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