

# **A Policy Review Paper Assessing the Nielsen and Rincón Study on *Latino Television Viewing***

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An assessment of Nielsen's measurement of Latino television viewing habits and its critique in a Rincón and Associates' study entitled *Latino Television Study* is not purely or perhaps even primarily a social scientific exercise. The driving force of the critique is less about actual Hispanic<sup>2</sup> television watching behavior than about Hispanic demands for a greater role in all aspects of the television industry: advertising, casting Latino and Latina actors in major as well as minor roles; promoting programming built around Hispanic themes; promoting Latino-oriented programs that have Latino actors; and recruiting Latino screen writers, musicians, and related media professionals. All of which is premised in large part on claims that Nielsen underestimates the Latino television audience.

The Rincón and Associates' report, then, must be understood in this context. It is at least as much a part of the arsenal of many Hispanic advocates that is designed to improve Hispanic access to mainstream media and all that comes with it, e.g., status, jobs and visibility, as it is a critique of Nielsen ratings. The long history of exclusion that Hispanics have experienced makes this approach understandable but should not be sufficient grounds for unsubstantiated (as opposed to legitimate) criticisms of the Nielsen methodology.

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<sup>2</sup> We use the terms, Hispanic and Latino, interchangeably throughout the report to refer to residents of the United States who can trace their ancestry to the Spanish speaking regions of Latin America and the Caribbean.

It is equally relevant to note that several Hispanic advocates involved with this issue have explicitly stated that their fight is as much with Nielsen as it is with their methodology. Time and again, they describe Nielsen as lacking transparency and uncooperative. Such behaviors, combined with the lack of awareness Latino advocates have regarding the details of media behavior assessment and the reality of limited Hispanic representation in the television industry, produce a deep distrust of Nielsen. Thus Latino advocates reject Nielsen's current description of television watching because it serves to legitimize the current pattern of marginalization and exclusion.

Additionally, Hispanic advocates caution that the heterogeneity of American Hispanics is so substantial that only a carefully designed and nuanced methodology could possibly capture its reality. Given their level of distrust, they do not believe that Nielsen has the capability or willingness to conduct such a study.

There is one final dimension to the context within which the Rincón and Associates' report was developed. No more than five years ago, Hispanic media specialists and leaders in general were extremely critical of media use reports that did not acknowledge the extent to which Hispanics relied on Spanish language media. Now, as evident in the Rincón and Associates' report, Latino media elites and political leaders generally are focused on the Hispanic use of English-language media. More than one individual involved with the National Hispanic Media Coalition (NHMC) informed us that Rincón and Associates was directed by the NHMC to pay particular attention to non-Spanish-language TV-viewing habits of Hispanics. The Rincón and Associates' report clearly adhered very closely to those instructions and documented what has been evident for sometime—that Latino viewers engage both English- and Spanish-language television.

In conclusion, the context within which the Rincón and Associates’ report was generated may be more significant than the report itself. As the following pages indicate, we evaluated both Rincón and Nielsen methodologies to measure Latino television viewing patterns. While both have strong and weak points, the way Latino advocates view Nielsen is almost uniformly negative and critical. Therefore, the results of our evaluation may be less relevant than efforts Nielsen may and should employ with the Hispanic community at large.

### **Analysis of Nielsen Methodology**

Are Nielsen ratings for Latino television viewers accurate? For some, the answer is clearly no. Nielsen has been criticized for undercounting television viewers of color. Specifically, ratings for television programs considered to be popular among African Americans and Latinos are significantly lower when they are measured using Nielsen’s people meter system—an electronic tracking system drawing on an electronic device attached to televisions in the household—than measured using the current diary method. Such discrepancies in ratings certainly beg explanations and careful investigations, some of which are beyond the scope of this study.

Our primary intent is to review the Nielsen methodology for measuring Latino television viewership as criticized by a study conducted by Rincón and Associates entitled “*Latino Television Study*.” Rincón and Associates in the *Latino Television Study* criticized Nielsen for severely undercounting Latino viewers who watch English television and making the decision to weight its national people meter samples by the Spanish Language Usage in the Home variable.

Upon reviewing Rincón and Associates' *Latino Television Study* as well as Nielsen's "National Reference Supplement 2003-2004," "Local Reference Supplement 2003-2004," and "Nielsen Research Paper-Language Use Research Program," we conclude that the *Latino Television Study* does not provide conclusive evidence that warrants its criticism against the Nielsen methodology. We will discuss in great detail Rincón and Associates' *Latino Television Study* in the following section, but two points are worth mentioning here.

First, Rincón and Associates' sampling methodology using a mix of Random Digit Dialing (RDD) samples and samples drawn from directory listed households with Spanish surnames is not better than Nielsen's area probability sampling. Its resulting sample thus is by no means more representative of the Latino television viewing public than the Nielsen's Hispanic sample. It further follows that Rincón and Associates' estimates of the Latino television viewing universe based on their sample is no better than Nielsen's estimates.

Second, Rincón and Associates relied solely on respondents' recall to measure television viewing patterns, while Nielsen utilized the electronic tracking system. As the literature in survey research indicates, respondents' recall and retrospective evaluations are prone to errors in measurement. Ironically, noting that foreign-born Latinos are more likely than their native-born counterparts to find it difficult to recall the names of English-language movies that they have seen, Rincón and Associates in its *Latino Television Study* indicated "potential problems in the measurement of English-language television programs when retrospective recall is an integral part of the measurement process" (p. 1). In sum, we do not find convincing the Rincón and Associates' claim that

their approach resulted in a better estimate of Latino television viewing patterns and Nielsen under-estimates the number of Latinos watching any specific show. In our view, Rincón and Associates' *Latino Television Study* does not seem to have offered the kind of precision and rigor that they claim to present.

This does not mean, however, that the *Latino Television Study* is without merit. Following established practices in market research targeting the Latino community, Rincón and Associates made an attempt to take a reasonable approach to conduct the study. We thus take into consideration their findings to determine some areas for further attention. Specifically, we focus on one question raised by Rincón and Associates. Does Nielsen indeed undercount the number of Latinos who watch English television?

***On the issue of undercounting Latino television viewers***

We are not in the position to provide concrete evidence to prove that Nielsen in fact undercounted Latino television viewers. However, there are reasons to believe that this could be the case and certainly has been the case in the past. For one, consistent with the Census definition of Latino households, Nielsen only counted households in which the householder is Latino as a Latino household in drawing its National Hispanic People Meter (NHPM) sample (as well as samples for its national and local Hispanic enumeration surveys). This means that all Latino TV viewers living in a household with the non-Latino householder are excluded from consideration, which may lead to a misunderstanding of Latino television viewing patterns. These mixed ethnic households are particularly relevant in the Hispanic community where out-marriage rates in the third generation exceed fifty percent.

For another, Nielsen's reliance on Spanish as the language used for initial contact with households might have produced a sample where English-dominant households are under-represented. (A point strongly held by the Nielsen critics). This might have resulted in an undercount of English-dominant Latino television viewers. We will consider each of these issues below.

First, Nielsen indicates in its *National Reference Supplement 2003-2004* that it "determine[s] if the households are Hispanic based on the 2000 Census definition of Hispanic households" (1-5). According to the Census, a householder is "the person, or one of the people living [in the household] who owns, is buying, or rents this house, apartment, or mobile home." Then, if the householder is Latino, the household is counted as a Latino household. Nielsen excluded households in which the householder is not Latino, yet at least one other member is Latino from the sampling frame for its National Hispanic People Meter (NHPM) sample (as well as samples for its national and local Hispanic enumeration surveys).<sup>3</sup>

As part of this analysis, we conducted an analysis of the 2000 1-percent Public Use Microdata Sample (PUMS) files and found that the number of households with at least one member being Latino regardless of the ethnicity of the householder in the nation is about 11.1 million. On the other hand, the number of households in which the householder is Latino is about 10.5 million. This will become more problematic as a growing number of Latinos, in particular, Latinas, live with non-Latinos in the same household. Obviously, Latinos and Latinas living in a household with a non-Latino householder watch television. Their exclusion may lead to a misunderstanding of Latino television viewing patterns to the extent that their viewing habits may differ from those of

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<sup>3</sup> See Nielsen Media Research's *Local Reference Supplement 2003-2004*.

Latinos and Latinas living in a household in which the householder is Latino. In general, the dramatic growth of the U.S. Hispanic population is presenting measurement services with increasingly complex and unforeseen dynamics, which are impeding an accurate count of Latino television households.

For example, it is not unreasonable to believe that Latinos and Latinas living in an ethnically mixed household will be much more English dominant than those who live in a household in which the householder is Latino. By excluding ethnically mixed households from its sampling frame, following the U.S. Census methodology, chances are that Nielsen's Hispanic People Meter sample (as well as samples for its national and local Hispanic enumeration surveys) might be skewed in favor of Spanish dominant Latino households.

Second, Nielsen indicates in its *National Reference Supplement 2003-2004* that "when interviewed, the initial contact with each household [for enumerating the National Hispanic People Meter sample] is in Spanish" (1-5). This practice will certainly help recruit Spanish-speaking Latino households. But it might prevent English-dominant Latino households from being recruited into the sample. This might introduce a bias into the sample in favor of Spanish-dominant households.

According to an extensive study done by a group of researchers at Nielsen Media Research, however, the practice of starting the interview in Spanish has little effect on Nielsen's Spanish language universe estimates.<sup>4</sup> Specifically, the study finds that there is little difference in the resulting response rate and estimates of the language used in the home (English vs. Spanish) between the procedure of starting the interview in Spanish

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<sup>4</sup> Timothy Dolson, et al. 2003. "Language of Content, Non-response and Measurement Error in a Multimode National Language Enumeration Survey." Paper presented at the annual meeting of American Association for Public Opinion Research (AAPOR), Nashville, TN

and that of starting the interview in the language that the respondent used when they answered the door or phone. Given the study findings, one could conclude that the language used to start the interview has no substantive implications. Ironically, however, if the rates of response are the same,<sup>5</sup> there would be no particular need to continue the procedure of starting the interview in Spanish. Further, it is less than certain how and how much the language to begin the interview will affect the response to the “language used in the home” questions. For instance, there are still possibilities that those who were contacted in Spanish could *over-report* the use of Spanish among the household members, while under-reporting the use of English. Therefore, contact with households may need to be done in the preferred language of the household member being called upon, which would help avoid the over-representation of Spanish-dominant households in the sample.

If the Nielsen methodology has these potential shortcomings, does the Rincón and Associates’ study offer a more precise picture? To answer this, we turn to the specific study issued by Rincón and Associates entitled “*Latino Television Study*.”

### **Analysis of Rincon and Associates’ *Latino Television Study***

In order to assess Latino television viewing patterns, Rincón and Associates conducted a telephone survey of Latino households with televisions and telephone access. This survey was conducted in four media markets—Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and San Antonio Designated Market Areas (DMAs). Rincón conducted 384 interviews in each of these markets. A sample of this size leads to results that have a margin of error of plus or minus 5 percent for each DMA (and less than 3 percent for the entire sample).

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<sup>5</sup> According to Dolson, et al. (2003), “[the procedure of starting the interview in Spanish] was implemented because, historically, response rates have been lower than average among Spanish speaking households.” Interestingly, their study invalidates such a concern over lower response rates among Spanish speaking households.

All respondents were 16 years of age or above and were given the option of completing the survey in Spanish or English.

Each surveyed household was re-contacted twice to collect data for a household language inventory that evaluated the language(s) used by all household members and the nativity of the respondent and his/her mother and father. These data were initially collected from a second household member and then validated within a two week period through an additional interview with either the first or second respondent. The report does not indicate whether a third, verification, interview was conducted with single-member households. There is some indication in the report text that, on occasion, a third household member served to verify the inventory data provided by the second household member.

Each respondent was individually screened on his/her language preference and whether s/he was “Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino.” In addition to collecting extensive demographic data about the respondent, the survey asked about the frequency of television viewing, the station(s) watched, the balance of viewing between English- and Spanish-language broadcasting, the programs most often watched (asked separately for English- and Spanish-language television), frequency of watching two specific English-language programs (*The George Lopez Show* and *American Family*), household viewing patterns (and the impact of household members on languages of programs viewed), viewing patterns of children in the household, most recent movie seen, the importance of Latino and Latina actors in the selection of movies or television shows to view, and access to various television stations, cable networks, and media technologies (SAP and satellite).

Interviews were conducted in August, September, and October 2003. Rincón and Associates staggered interviews by research site. So, data were collected in Los Angeles between August 11 and August 19, in Miami from August 20 and August 28, in New York from September 2 and September 9, and in San Antonio from September 10 and September 22. Follow-up interviews with other household members (to collect and verify the household inventory) continued until October 21, 2003.

The data presented in Rincón and Associates' analysis was weighted in two ways to reflect the population in the DMAs under study. First, the sample generated too high a share of women. Approximately 58 percent of respondents were women compared to approximately 52 percent of the adult Latino population in these four DMAs. Second, approximately 63 percent of survey respondents were foreign-born compared to 56 percent of the Latino adult population in the research sites. Rincón developed a weighting strategy to reduce the influence of Latinas and foreign-born respondents on the results presented for each DMA.

Rincón and Associates' *Latino Television Study* offers a variety of insights about the Latino television viewing public. Some of these confirm earlier findings—including analysis of media use conducted by the Tomás Rivera Policy Institute (TRPI)—while others are new or more focused on the period in which the Rincón and Associates survey was in the field—such as the analysis of the share of respondents who watched *The George Lopez Show*, *American Family*, or movies in release in the Summer and early Fall of 2003. Our goal here is not to discuss or reanalyze these findings, but instead to suggest some methodological concerns with the sample design implemented by Rincón and Associates. Perhaps more importantly, we indicate that the use of a single survey is

an ineffective strategy to test the validity of some of the National Latino Media Council's concerns with Nielsen's measurements of Latino media viewing patterns.

### *Sample and Generalizability*

The ultimate validity of the Rincón and Associates' study rests on its sample of Latino viewers. The four DMAs in the Rincón and Associates' study—Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and San Antonio—are among the largest cities for Latino population in the United States. Inherently, any selection such as this will exclude other large cities, in this case Chicago, Houston, and Phoenix, as well as those Latinos residing in smaller cities or rural areas. The selection of Los Angeles, New York, Miami, and San Antonio may lead to the over-representation of non-Mexican-ancestry Latinos—in particular, Latinos with ancestry or origin in the Caribbean.<sup>6</sup> Three of these cities are destinations of Latino migration. As a result, immigrants and the second generation will be somewhat over-represented in the sample relative to the national Latino population.

Rincón and Associates is certainly aware of this dilemma—not just wanting to focus on areas of large Latino and Latino immigrant concentration—which led to the decision to add San Antonio to the project. San Antonio, however, can not serve as a surrogate for all Latino-concentration areas outside of Los Angeles, New York, and Miami that have relatively smaller immigrant populations.

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<sup>6</sup> According to the March 2002 Current Population Survey (CPS), persons of Mexican origin constitute the largest national origin group, accounting for 67% of all Latinos living in the United States. Puerto Ricans and Cubans are the second and third largest national origin groups, respectively constituting 9% and 4% of the Latino population. Latinos of Mexican origin tend to concentrate in the southwest region of the country, while Puerto Ricans and Cubans are predominantly living in New York City and Miami, respectively. Samples drawn exclusively from the four DMAs in disproportionate to the sizes of different Latino national origin groups may not reflect the distribution of national origin groups within the Latino community at the national level. Chances are that in the sample, persons of Mexican origin would be under-represented, while those of Puerto Rican and Cuban origin would be over-represented.

While there is no inherent value in a sample design based on four DMAs as opposed to the seventeen used by Nielsen in its Hispanic Television Index, a sample built on a small number of cities is less likely than a sample built on a larger number of media markets to lead to a more representative sample of *national* Latino viewing patterns. By conducting more interviews in fewer cities, however, Rincon and Associates seems to assure that it could speak with greater accuracy (a margin of error of plus or minus five percent) to Latino viewing patterns in these cities.

Any survey is going to be limited by its sample and the decisions that are made about where to conduct the survey. These concerns could have been mitigated with a more thorough discussion of the sample demographics and a comparison of these demographics to those of Latinos in the DMAs under study and to the Latino population nationally (the comparison to national survey data on Latino population characteristics in terms of immigrant generation in Table 9 is a bit disingenuous since these compare the four-city data to a national survey<sup>7</sup>). The only thorough discussion comparing sample to population demographics takes place in the methodological discussion of weighting. Of the three demographic characteristics discussed—age, nativity, and gender—two show wide gaps between the sample and the Latino adult population of the DMAs necessitating the implementation of a weighting strategy. To the extent that the sample demographics differ significantly from the population demographics, the results could be weighted to reflect the national Latino population.

The sample size in each DMA ensures that in 95 percent of the cases the reported answer is within five percent of actual result if a survey were conducted with the entire

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<sup>7</sup> Decennial census data do not allow for the calculation of a measure of immigrant generation. These data can be calculated using Current Population Survey data.

population. This five percent margin of error is a standard measure for much survey research except in cases, such as just before a presidential election, where more precision is needed. We would be cautious however in extrapolating from these point estimates to make specific claims about the number of viewers for a specific television show in the seventeen DMAs included in the Nielsen Hispanic Television Index. Surveys of this magnitude (384 respondents per DMA in just four DMAs) are simply not designed to provide the level of specificity offered in the report. If the point estimates were presented as ranges, the results of the Rincón and Associates study could well be compatible with those of the Nielsen Hispanic Television Index. Multiple surveys or surveys with larger sample sizes in each DMA would allow for more precise and reliable estimates.

The methodological discussion is incomplete in several areas and, consequently, raises further concerns about how representative the sample is. There needs to be a slightly more complete discussion of which Spanish surname list was employed. The more names that are screened for, the more representative the sample will be. Survey houses vary widely on the number of surnames identified as being Latino.

Second, it is not clear whether the RDD component of the survey was drawn from throughout the DMAs. From the sample disposition summary presented in Table 3, it would appear that the random digit dialing was only conducted in areas of high Latino concentration. We say this because Table 3 reports that only 268 calls resulted in reaching a non-Hispanic household.<sup>8</sup> Since fully 307 of the 1,536 interviews resulted from RDD calls and some of the calls to households with Latino surname householders would likely result in reaching households with respondents who did not identify as

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<sup>8</sup> An additional 49 calls could not be completed due to a “language barrier.” These were quite likely also non-Latino households.

“Spanish, Hispanic, or Latino,” it would appear that the RDD component of the survey was not conducted throughout the DMA, but instead in areas of relatively high Latino concentration (hence the small number of terminations upon finding a non-Latino household). To the extent that this is true, the survey may not be capturing differences, if any, between Latinos without Spanish surnames and those with Spanish surnames in terms of language use or viewing patterns. For example, Latinos without Spanish surnames tend to be more acculturated native-born Latinos (particularly third and beyond generation Latinos) married to non-Latinos or who are the children of marriages between Latinos and non-Latinos. Again, further analysis could shed light on the sample population generated through RDD. The results of the 307 interviews generated through RDD could be compared to the remaining respondents on key demographic and viewing pattern variables.

### ***Respondent Selection and Survey Implementation***

The design of the survey may have added to these concerns about the representativeness of the sample. First, Rincón and Associates called each number in its sample up to four times. After four call-backs, the number was removed from the sample (this occurred with at least 5,624 and as many as 9,360 phone numbers). Most scholarly surveys rely on at least six call backs at varying times of the day and days of the week and experimental evidence indicates that significant numbers of responses can be generated by calling back between eight and nine times. The lower number of call backs has a particular consequence for studies of television since potential respondents who are not home as frequently are less likely to be viewing television and would likely have distinctive viewing patterns.

Second, the survey screening is designed in part to randomize who in the household answers the survey. The interviewer initially asks to speak to the person in the household who is sixteen years of age or older and who has most recently celebrated a birthday. This is an appropriate and frequently used strategy to ensure that individuals who are most likely to answer the telephone are not the ones that are always used as survey respondents. A survey just of telephone-answerers would be more likely to speak to older or younger people who are outside of the workforce, would be somewhat more likely to speak to women than men, and would be more likely to speak to people with lower incomes than higher incomes.

In the Rincón methodology, however, if the individual with the most recent birthday in the household is not available, the interviewer is to ask for the person with the next-most-recent birthday instead of scheduling a call back to reach the person with the most recent birthday (after the second potential respondent is found not to be home, the interviewer is instructed to schedule a call back). This screening methodology is certainly less expensive, but increases the likelihood that the respondent selected will not be random from within the household. It is likely that this screening strategy resulted in the over-representation of women (who are more likely to be at home for a larger share of the day) and the foreign-born in the sample. Considering that the research design was not focused on follow-up call-backs, it is not clear how often Rincon did re-contact a potential respondent. Table 3 indicates that there were over 2,500 numbers available in the sample for call-backs upon completion of the survey.

The screening strategy employed also reduces the likelihood that Latino respondents in mixed Latino/non-Latino households would be selected for inclusion in

the survey. Considering the expense of the RDD component of the study (whatever its scope), this is a considerable omission and opportunity lost. When the interviewer asks for the person in the household sixteen years of age or above who celebrated his/her birthday most recently, no mention is made of ethnicity. So, if the selected respondent were non-Latino, the interview would quickly terminate. There is no follow-up question at this point to see if there is another person sixteen years of age or above who is Latino.

Finally, we should note that the reported response rate of 28.3 percent is relatively low for social scientific survey research<sup>9</sup> and introduces the likelihood of non-response error. The potential respondents in the sample who were not surveyed cannot be assumed to have the demographic traits, television viewing patterns, or family characteristics similar to those who did respond. Again, this is not a criticism unique to the work that Rincon and Associates have done in this survey. But, our concerns could be ameliorated by a more thorough discussion of the frequency of following up with household members who were not present in the household at the time of the first survey contact and a comparative analysis of the demographics of the sample compared to the demographic characteristics of the Latinos sixteen years of age and older in the four DMAs under study.

### ***Questionnaire Design***

In addition to these concerns about Rincon and Associates' sampling and screening methodologies, we also have several concerns with the design of the questionnaire. Perhaps most importantly, Rincon and Associates sees one of the great

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<sup>9</sup> In a separate analysis, Nielsen Media Research re-calculates the Rincon and Associates response rate to between 12 and 15 percent. See Nielsen Media Research, "Response by Nielsen Media Research to Report Titled "*Latino Television Study*," by Rincón and Associates for the National Latino Media Council, March 26, 2004.

strengths of this survey as the ability to conduct the survey in either Spanish or English and to greet “the respondent in the language they answer the telephone” because “this is important in order to minimize the bias that is introduced by monolingual interviewers” (p. 14). We would certainly agree that surveys of Latino populations must be able to be conducted in both Spanish and English by interviewers that are fully capable of continuing in either language. Call backs to Spanish-, or English-speaking, respondents introduce unacceptable bias. That said, however, we are unclear on how the interviewer can ascertain which language to begin the screening with based simply on the greeting one is provided when a phone is answered. In many cases, this greeting is similar in English or Spanish and some interviewer discretion must be used to decide what language to begin the screening with. This decision inherently biases the language of interview for bilingual respondents.<sup>10</sup>

Although it is not stated explicitly to respondents, this survey clearly has a focus on Spanish- and English-language television viewing. In addition to the bilingual interviewers, the questions about television viewing habits include a rich inventory of Spanish- and English-language television stations in each DMA. This raises some concerns about whether some of the reported viewership for the two programs about which specific questions are asked—*The George Lopez Show* and *American Family*—may be capturing some desire on the part of the respondent to provide the socially desirable response, specifically to say that they do watch one or both shows. The likelihood that respondents will offer socially desirable responses is a risk in all survey research and cannot be completely avoided. Volunteered responses as to all programs

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<sup>10</sup> We should note that we reviewed the English-language version of the questionnaire in the published report. No mention was made in the methodological discussion of questionnaire translation or strategies employed to ensure that the meaning was the same in both languages.

watched might generate more neutral results. Here it is important to note that in response to the question about the most watched English-language program(s) (question 27), *The George Lopez Show* appears in the top ten shows mentioned in San Antonio (fifth most frequently mentioned) and Los Angeles (tenth most frequently mentioned). *The George Lopez Show* was not in the top ten English-language shows mentioned in Miami or New York. *American Family* was not mentioned among the ten most frequently mentioned English-language shows in any of the four cities under study. Finally, asking about viewing these programs during a specific time frame (the last month, for example) might also provide more reliable results.

The period in the field may also be problematic. The field period was “August, September, and October of 2003” (p. 14), but all of the first wave interviews were conducted before September 22 and all but San Antonio were completed before September 9. Part and maybe all of this period was before the new television season started, so this would be a period in which fewer new shows are being aired and respondents’ memories may be shaped disproportionately by their recent experiences. With a research strategy based on multiple surveys, the odds of being in the field in periods of repeats would be diminished.

### ***A Concluding Observation***

Surveys are powerful tools that can offer rich insights about values, attitudes, and behaviors. Despite our concerns about the sample, about respondent selection and survey implementation, and about questionnaire design, our assessment would be that the *Latino Television Study* offers some important insights about Latino television viewing patterns. Latinos engage television in both Spanish and English. They like the opportunity to see

shows with Latino content or Latino actors, but they also watch shows of general appeal. News programming is the most watched program in each of the DMAs, in Spanish and English, and among the foreign and native born. Perhaps most importantly for the future, children are much more likely than their parents to watch English-language programming, which may have consequences for Spanish-language programmers in the future.

The question that guided the *Latino Television Study*, however, was not simply about Latino television viewing behaviors. Instead, it was whether a more accurate assessment of these behaviors could be made using survey methodologies than the in-home, real time measurements used by Nielsen Media Research. Our concerns about sample, respondent selection, and survey implementation raise doubts in our minds that this survey has been more effective. However, each of these problems could be addressed. That said, we should note a final concern that would apply to surveys in general. Specifically, they have to rely on respondent memory and retrospective evaluation of behaviors (in this case viewing patterns). These retrospective evaluations are inherently more subject to variation and bias than are behaviors recorded whether technologically or through manual recording in real time.

## Final Comments

As noted earlier, controversies around the Nielsen ratings system provoke so much emotion among the communities of color that we feel as if we are not dealing with what seems to be purely scientific issues involving statistics and sampling but rather a political issue. Further, we are aware that all parties involved in the dispute might not play a non-zero sum game. Simply put, there may be a tendency to define winners and losers in this dispute surrounding the Nielsen ratings. It is not our intention to take sides, but to have an objective, independent look at the heart of the dispute as engaged by Rincón and Associates' *Latino Television Study*.

We have concluded that the *Latino Television Study* does not provide concrete, unequivocal evidence that leads us to believe the Nielsen's methodology is fundamentally flawed. Although Rincón and Associates conducted the study in a defensible way following established practices in the survey industry, we believe that the data the study offered cannot be used to invalidate Nielsen's approach to measuring Latino viewing patterns. In our judgment, Rincón and Associates' approach is no better than Nielsen's and is less comprehensive in its coverage than Nielsen, so we cannot fully accept Rincón and Associate's criticism against the Nielsen methodology. Further, the claim that people meters do not accurately measure Latino viewing behavior is not documented and can not be accepted at face value. As one Spanish-language television executive told us, "there is no question that people meters provide a superior technology for determining viewership."

Despite this, however, the Rincón and Associates' study has prompted us to take a critical look at the Nielsen methodology and to make the following recommendations to

Nielsen or any other organization that wants to measure Latino television viewing patterns:

- It should be mindful about the size of a Latino sample. A sample of 1,000 Latino households included in the National Hispanic People Meter panel might be good enough to gauge Latino television viewing at the national level, but it is not sufficient to enable Nielsen to use it to describe Latino viewing behavior in individual local markets especially outside of Los Angeles and Miami. While Nielsen makes no such claims, it would reduce misunderstandings if Nielsen were even more emphatic on this theme.
- It should use a more inclusive definition of Latino households. We have suggested defining a Latino household as one in which any member is Latino regardless of the ethnicity of the householder.
- It should initiate interviews with households in the preferred language of the household member when it is obvious what that language is. Otherwise, it could consider randomly rotating English and Spanish to be the language of initial contact to minimize the magnitude of a potential bias that might have been introduced if one language were exclusively used to make the initial contact.
- It should allow for full transparency in describing its methodological approach including full disclosure of problems encountered such as non-response and refusal to participate rates with corresponding demographics.

The Latino community's dynamic population growth and its national dispersion make this community a significant segment of the nation's television viewing public and

consumer market. A nuanced and accurate description is needed to describe the television habits of this community. Future research is needed to better fill this need.

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