

VIEWING AMERICA: A QUALITATIVE ANALYSIS OF HOW NICARAGUAN  
CITIZENS PERCEIVE U.S. LIFESTYLES AND HOW U.S. TELEVISION  
PROGRAMMING INFLUENCES THOSE PERCEPTIONS

By

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Abstract of Thesis Presented to the Graduate School  
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This qualitative study explores how Nicaraguan individuals perceive the U.S. and how U.S. television programs broadcast in Nicaragua influence those perceptions.

Through in-depth interviews conducted in Nicaragua the study sought to identify the perceptions that the participants had about U.S. family life, socio-economic status, job opportunities, leisure activities and violence/law enforcement. The aim was also to isolate how specific American television programs contributed to how the participants understood these aspects of U.S. lifestyles.

The results show that fictional programs like *Friends*, *My Wife and Kids*, and *The Simpsons* had a distinctive influence on how the participants saw family life and leisure activities. Similarly, crime dramas like *NYPD Blue* and *The Precinct* influenced how they thought about violence/law enforcement. In general, they thought that the individualistic nature of Americans relegated the family unit to a secondary position of importance in the U.S. They also believed that while the U.S. was more violent than

Nicaragua, the U.S. counted on better trained and better equipped law enforcement officials than Nicaragua.

The areas of job opportunities and socio-economic status were influenced by non-fictional programs like news shows, which mostly reinforced ideas that the participants learned from interpersonal contact with family members and friends who had been to the U.S. In general, the participants saw these two aspects of the U.S. through the lens of Hispanic immigrants struggling in the U.S. The participants believed that jobs were plentiful in the U.S. but that they required dedication and hard work to maintain. They had no clear notion of the socio-economic system but believed that through education and effort any individual could climb up the socio-economic ladder in the U.S. Another key influence in how they perceived job opportunities and the socio-economic structure in the U.S. was Univision, the largest Spanish-language network in the U.S. Many of Univision's programs are broadcast in Nicaragua. In shows like *Cristina* and Univision's network news the participants were able to see and learn about the Hispanic population that lives in the U.S.

## CHAPTER 1 INTRODUCTION

### **Introduction**

The major global events of the past several years and the monumental impact they have had on how the United States and other countries conduct international diplomacy have made it necessary to evaluate how the citizens of other nations perceive the American system.

Over the last 40 years, television has become the dominant shaper of how people perceive the world they live in. Media researchers, concerned with the effects that television viewing has on people's perceptions, attitudes, and values, assume that because television might also be the most common influence on viewers, it heavily contributes to an audience's conception of the world (Kang & Morgan, 1988, p. 431)

Nicaragua, a small Central American country of some 5 million people, lacks significant locally produced programming but lies at the crux of several television "powerhouses." The large majority of Nicaraguan broadcasting is made up of programming from Mexico, Brazil, and the United States, not only on the four national networks, but also on the dozens of channels provided by the cable services in that country. Many of the countries of the world have a similar dynamic, mixing programming from numerous sources and across national borders. As such, Nicaragua is the ideal location to try to ascertain the influence that television programming may have on the way that citizens abroad may perceive the United States and the lifestyle of its citizens.

A central issue in international communication research has always been the great influence that the Western countries, the United States in particular, have over the rest of the world's media, information, economic, cultural, and political systems. The concern stems partly from the fear that, as dependency theorists posit, less developed countries have been unable to develop economically, politically, and socially because of their dependence on foreign investment and technology. Economic and social expansion, then, has taken place from a few Western nations to subordinate nations in a manner that "follows the logic of economic determinism in which market forces rule in order to place as well as determine the winners and losers – whether they be individuals, corporations, or nation states" (Mcphail, 2002, p. 15). In terms of communications, the same economic determinism has led to a largely unilateral flow of media, communications hardware and software, and information protocol from the Western nations to the less developed countries (p. 14).

Schiller (1992) pointed out in his famous work *Mass Communication and American Empire* that the economic and military supremacy that the United States has had since World War II also allowed it to become the leader in communications and information technology in the world. In his original 1969 book, Schiller argued that the United States not only exported U.S. radio and television programming, owned countless communications facilities abroad, and manufactured the equipment necessary for electronic broadcasting, but that it was also decisive in spreading an American commercial model of communications (pp. 137-144).

At the heart of Schiller's argument is the notion that American values, beliefs, and ideals are overwhelming and submerging the local cultures they are electronically

invading and displacing them to the background. He argues that the United States is undermining the local cultures of these countries and culturally homogenizing these foreign markets with program material “tailored almost exclusively to fit the market needs of the consumer goods producers who sponsor and finance the programming” (p.156).

This study does not, however, intend to study, as other researchers in the cultural studies have done (Tsai, 1970; Canclini, 1982; Tan, Tan, & Tan, 1987; Chu, Schramm, & Schramm, 1991; Skinner, 2001; Rampal, 2001), how the local culture of the Nicaraguan citizens has been influenced or even altered by the American beliefs, values, and ideals projected on the television screen. Instead, this study aims to identify how American culture is being interpreted in Nicaragua and how specific programs on television may be influencing how that culture is interpreted. Furthermore, the study also seeks to examine how the Nicaraguan culture itself influences how the U.S. television texts are being interpreted.

### **Nicaraguan Society and Culture: A Brief Introduction**

Nicaragua is known as the “Land of Lakes and Volcanoes” and diverse temperatures and terrain exist throughout the country. The country can be divided into the three distinct areas: the Pacific lowlands, the central mountainous highlands, and the Caribbean lowlands. Most of Nicaragua’s 5 million citizens live in the cities that are closest to the Pacific Ocean. Walker (2003) notes that in Nicaragua

The people are relatively homogenous and culturally integrated. There are no major racial, ethnic, linguistic, or religious divisions. Practically all Nicaraguans are Catholic, speak Spanish, and share a common cultural heritage. The majority are mestizo, a mixture of Spanish and Indian. And though there are some “pure” whites, Indians, and blacks, little racial prejudice exists. (p. 2)

Gold-Biss (2003) points out that the 5% of the population that is indigenous, such as the Miskito, the Sumo, and the Garifuno, live mostly near the Caribbean in provinces that are largely autonomous (p. 5). Afro-Nicaraguans, descendants of black slaves brought to Nicaragua by the English during the colonial period, also live near the Atlantic Coast. He also goes on to say that race, religion, and ethnicity are not social issues in Nicaragua.

The nation of Nicaragua has historically been unstable both politically and economically, and this is no less true of the last three decades when two civil wars as well ineffectual governments, accused of corruption and mismanagement, have left the country in dire circumstances. While poverty in the country has existed throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century the changing nature of the country's economic, political, and social policies- from governments implementing largely socialist programs to others touting neoliberal reforms- have all contributed to a general impoverishment that had never been seen before. According to the 2002 United Nations Human Development Report on Nicaragua (p. 32), almost 46% of the people in Nicaragua live in poverty and survive on about a U.S. \$1 a day. The income distribution is also among the worst in the world. Arana (1997) says that in the 1990s President Chamorro and her administration "moved from a state centered model of accumulation and a significantly regulated economy to a market-oriented economy" and privatized large sectors of the economy like transportation and fishing (p. 86). Historically, the country's main industry has been agro-export of products such as coffee, cotton, rice, and sugar. While the economy grew in the mid-1990s and unemployment dropped, the structural adjustments (advocated by the IMF) "had caused such dislocations and underutilization of productive resources, including

labor, that the social cost had become a political issue” (p. 92). Another problem has been the urbanization of the country, which has led to the creation of barrios that often have shortages of water and electricity (Babb, 2001, pp. 46-49, 70-91). Crime is also a problem. The 2002 United Nations Human Development Report (UNHDR) on Nicaragua reports that crimes against individuals and properties have increased by 29% and 16% respectively from 1997 to 2001 (p. 35).

Walker (2003) says that the largest social cleavage in Nicaragua is that of class. He implies that though the Sandinista government of the 1980s sought to even the income distribution among the classes by passing various reforms, including agrarian reforms, the policies of the administrations that followed them have returned the marked class differences. He says that the “middle sector” have identified more with the upper class than with the 80% of the people that are impoverished in the country. He also notes that a real type of tension and distrust still lingers between classes (pp. 116-134).

Two very distinct Church priorities took root in Nicaragua, says Linkogle (1996), during the last three decades that influenced social policy in the country. During the 1970s and 1980s, the Catholic Church preached a liberation theology, which was “keenly concerned with processes of social change as achieved through the transformed consciousness of oppressed people,” (p.16) and sought to challenge the hierarchy and injustices that existed in society. While this contributed greatly to the many changes that Nicaragua experienced in the 1980s, in the 1990s the Church turned to fighting the forces of secularism, particularly among the middle class (p. 173). Throughout the 1990s, the Church again reestablished its influence in public policy matters that were largely lost during the Sandinista administration. The Church’s positions on such things as family

law, sex education and abortion, and morality in general were taken up by the Ministry of Education and Health (Stein, 1997, pp. 242-244).

While Linkogle (1996) suggests that the Church has contributed to the traditional notions of women's roles in Nicaragua (pp. 208-210), Walker (2003) indicates that the general culture in Nicaragua has contributed to the misogynistic notions of gender roles in that society (p. 115). Gold-Bliss (2003) says that while civil law protects the rights of women, they are still discriminated and harassed because "deeply rooted cultural practices of male dominance (machismo) and the exclusion of women from significant public roles (marianismo) are rampant" (p. 5).

### **Nicaraguan Media**

Over the last decades Nicaragua has remained one of the poorest nations in the Western Hemisphere. Though it has "abundant and rich agricultural lands, considerable potential for geothermal and hydroelectric energy, important timber and mineral resources, and convenient located waterways that make Nicaragua an ideal site for an interoceanic canal" (Walker, 2003, p. 1) the socio-economic policies it has implemented as well as its political instability over the last three decades have brought about a "regressive distribution of income" according to the United Nations Development Program's Human Development Index (p. viii). As such, the country's infrastructure and telecommunications sector have remained deficient and under-maintained.

According to Norsworthy (1997), the communications media in Nicaragua has been "intricately bound up with the fierce political and ideological struggles that checker the country's history as an independent nation (p. 281). During the 1980s the Sandinista government, a leftist government that sought "socialist and social democratic inspired philosophies of mobilization, public service, and social responsibility" (p. 282), sought a

media reform project that planned to break the commercial and advertising-related media models that have generally existed in Nicaragua and Latin America. Norsworthy notes that through legislation and a redistribution of media enterprises the government achieved the coexistence of private, mixed, state, and cooperative ventures in the mass media. While pluralistic ideas existed in radio and print, the state maintained a monopoly over the only two national broadcast channels, Channel 2 and Channel 6. The Sandinistas' "cultural democratization" project was never fully achieved due to the change in government in 1990. The new president, Violeta Chamorro, deregulated the country's media systems and returned to an advertising-based media model. An intense competition for audiences erupted between radio, television, and print, and also led to significant investment in modern equipment and to the professionalization of the media (p. 285). Television began competing and even displacing both print and radio as the medium of choice during the 1990s as the number of over-the-air channels increased and cable television became available. In 1998, eight over-the air VHF channels and five UHF channels were broadcasting, though seven of those were mainly broadcasting to the Managua, the city's capital (Carlos, 1998).

The new channels as well as an increase in the hours that these channels broadcast led to the need to import programming from abroad, especially the "telenovelas" (soap operas) that are a staple of television in Nicaragua and other Latin American countries. In his book on Latin American television, Sinclair (1999) observes that throughout their history the Central American countries have imported programming from their larger and richer neighbors such as Mexico, Brazil, Venezuela, and Colombia. The shared geolinguistic characteristics between these countries have made the smaller countries

natural constituencies and markets for the larger television production houses such as Mexico's "Televisa" and Venezuela's "Venevision." Sinclair points out the unique viewing experience in Latin America. Viewers, he says, are not only exposed to local and national level programming, such as news and entertainment, but also are exposed to two distinct "transnational level programming". At the "transnational regional level" (i.e. the Latin American geolinguistic sphere) programming such as "telenovelas" and sports are available and at a "transnational-global level" programming such as "CNN," Hollywood movies, and other foreign programming can also be found (p. 13). In the last several years, Sinclair says, Latin American producers and distributors have made deals with U.S. satellite and cable services that have made more channels and content available (p. 18).

Today, Nicaragua has five over-the-air broadcast channels, channels 2, 4, 8, 10, and 12. About 60 to 65 % of the programming on the national networks is from Mexico and about 15% is from the U.S. The diverse programming on Channel 2, the oldest and top-rated channel in Nicaragua, is a good example of Sinclair's notion that viewers are exposed to programming from different regional levels. One can find Nicaraguan national news at 6:30 a.m., 6:30 p.m., and 10 p.m.; CNN news at 6 a.m.; Univision's talk show "Cristina," its dance show "Caliente" (from 8 a.m. to 10 .am.), and its U.S. network news at 6 p.m.; a lineup of telenovelas from Mexico, Colombia and Venezuela at all hours; and such U.S. shows as "The Flintstones," "The Agency," and "Ally McBeal" (See Appendix A). The other national channels also regularly run U.S.-produced series and Hollywood movies. An analysis of the programming on cable television shows a similar diversity of programming. The channel lineup for "Estesa," which provides cable

services to Managua, Masaya, Granada, and other cities, contains a large number of American networks, some not even available in the U.S. “TNT,” “TBS,” “E! Entertainment,” as well as “HBO,” “Cinemax,” Warner Channel,” and “Sony,” regularly have U.S. programming that is either dubbed into Spanish or contains Spanish subtitles (See Appendix B). These U.S. companies also have programming and movies tailored to the Latin American market on their channels in Latin America. While 93% of homes have access to television in Nicaragua (Carlos, 1998), only about 4% of the population has cable television however. For most Nicaraguans, Norsworthy (1997) says, the cost of subscription is prohibitively expensive though it is relatively inexpensive for a family with a modest income (p. 290).

With this as background, the following review looks at the reciprocal relationship between audiences and media texts. It begins with a discussion of theories of the television effects and “active” audiences, reviews Cultivation theory and its limitations, and explores the Uses and Gratifications paradigm, ending with an examination of schema and learning theories of how individuals filter, interpret, and organize the information/perceptions they encounter in their daily lives. It then proposes the core research questions for the study.

## CHAPTER 2 LITERATURE REVIEW

### **Introduction**

Two key assumptions are central to the research presented in this study. The first is that the media have diverse effects on individuals and, more importantly in terms of this study, that an “individual’s beliefs about the larger social world are shaped largely through mediated experience, via television, film, newspapers, magazines, novels, and textbooks” (Slater, 1990, p. 327). The research focuses on television because over the last 40 years it has become the dominant shaper of how people perceive the world they live in. The television unit seems to have become part of the family, if not the most important member. Over 1 billion television sets were broadcasting around the world in the 1990s and at least 55 percent of those sets were in North America and Europe (McCullagh, 2002, pg. 2). In Latin America, over 80 million homes in the largest Latin American countries have one or more television sets, and almost 12 million paid for some form of paid television signals (i.e. cable or wireless) (Sinclair, 1999, p. 3). In the United States, the average American household had it television on for over 7 hours and 4 minutes in the 1990s (Cheesbro, 1991, p. 197).

Conceptually, this study supposes that American television is one of the main sources if not the main source of information about American culture and people that foreign audiences have. Moreover, it is also assumed that television contributes immensely to the social stereotypes that exist about the United States. Stereotypes, Walter Lippmann (1922) wrote in the landmark book *Public Opinion*, arise out of the

limitations of time and space and the inability for intimate acquaintances with the world.

Thus.

The subtlest and most pervasive of all influences are those which create and maintain the repertory of stereotypes. We are told about the world before we see it. We imagine most things before we experience them. And those preconceptions, unless education has made us acutely aware, govern deeply the whole process of perception. (p. 57)

In their study of American stereotypes in Thailand, to take an example, Tan and Suarchavarat (1988) are concerned with how incomplete information about a social group (i.e. Americans), along with a steady pattern of images from U.S. television that fills the vacuum of information about the group, may lead to stereotypes that have little correspondence to reality.

### **Cultivation Theory**

Theoretically, this investigation borrows from Cultivation research, which has studied how television may cultivate and form impressions in individuals through exposure to recurring patterns of stories, images, themes, and messages. Cultivation theorists in media research, then, are mostly concerned with the effects that television viewing may have on people's perceptions, attitudes, and values about society. In "Growing Up With Television: The Cultivation Perspective," Gerbner, Gross, Morgan, and Signorielli (1994) note that "television has become the primary common source of socialization and everyday information (mostly in the form of entertainment) of otherwise heterogeneous populations" (p. 18).

In the first few studies of its kind, Gerbner and Gross (1976) and Gerbner et al (1977) surveyed television viewers about their perceptions about law enforcement and violence. The researchers found that heavy television viewers, when asked to identify the percentage of law enforcement officers in society, gave answers closer to the television

reality than did light television viewers. Similarly, when asked to identify the percentage of victims of crime, heavy television viewers gave answers closer to television numbers of violence than did light television viewers.

Other studies examining the difference between heavy and light television viewers have been conducted on different topics, including sex-role stereotypes (Gross & Jeffries-Fox, 1978; Morgan, 1987), minorities (Gerbner & Signorielli, 1978; Kiecolt & Sayles, 1988), perceptions of occupation and affluence (Fox & Philliber, 1978; Carlson, 1993; Sirgy et al, 1998; Appiah, 2002; Signorielli, 1993), children's family roles (Brown & Bryant, 1990), victimization and crime ( Eschholz, Chiricos, & Gertz, 2003; Weaver & Wakshlag, 1986) and political orientations (Jackson-Beeck, 1977)

Cultivation researchers have also studied the effects of television on international audiences. Morgan and Shanahan (1992), for instance, looked at the relationship between television viewing and gender role stereotypes, authoritarian beliefs, and mean world measures in Argentina and Taiwan. They found that Cultivation effects in the three categories were more significant for Argentinians than the Taiwanese, mainly because the Argentinians watched more television, on average, than did the Taiwanese. The researchers also pointed out that the fact that Argentina had more U.S. programming than Taiwan had an effect on perceptions about violence, gender roles, and authoritarian beliefs.

Similarly, Pingree and Hawkins (1981), in a study carried out in Australia measuring perceptions of violence and crime, found that those with more exposure to American programs saw life in Australia as more "mean" and "dangerous" than did those that weren't exposed to American programming. Varma (2000) surveyed high school

students in India to examine the psychological impact of international programming on them. The researcher found that the viewers of international programming wished for greater sexual freedom in their society and were more inclined towards Western dance and clothing. No significant differences between viewers and non-viewers, however, were found for drug and alcohol use, violence measures, and modeling.

In Korea, Kang and Morgan (1988) studied how the cultural values and beliefs of Koreans is impacted by the programming on AFKN, a group of television stations run by the U.S. military with programming that is entirely produced in the U.S. They found that Korean females who are heavy viewers of AFKN tend to have more “liberal” ideas about dating, marriage, and the role of the woman in Korean society than did females who lightly watched AFKN. Males who were heavy AFKN viewers, however, were more protective of the Korean values and culture than those who watched less AFKN. Other cultural studies that have examined the relationship between imported television programming and its cultural impact have been conducted in Iceland, the Philippines, the Caribbean, and Indonesia (Payne & Peake, 1977; Tan, Tan, & Tan, 1987; Pheko, Driscoll, & Salwen, 1996; Regis, 2001; Chu, Schramm, & Schramm, 1991; Ware & Dupagne, 1994)

Several criticisms of Gerbner and Gross’s (1976) original format for studying Cultivation effects have been expressed however. Hirsch (1980) found that the effects of television exposure are minimal if a researcher controls for other variables like the subject’s income and education instead of how many hours of television are watched. Other researchers have analyzed Cultivation effects in terms of specific program types and genres. Potter (1991) criticized what he saw as random as random categorization in

Cultivation analysis and found that no linear relationship existed between television exposure and perceptions of reality when the categorization of viewers and data were altered.

Katz, Liebes, & Berko (1992) moved beyond establishing a linear relationship and looked at the “relationship among text, situation-of-contact, and viewer involvement” (p. 157) in their research. After controlling for age and education the authors conducted focus groups in Jerusalem, L.A., and Japan to examine how different ethnic groups decoded the American hit ‘Dallas.’ The researchers were interested in how the subjects read the society that was represented on “Dallas” and how the subjects felt about the characters on the television shows. They found that while the viewers could, if they wanted to, free themselves from the “unreality” of the show, sooner or later the viewers were constrained to compare their own lives with the lives of the television characters of ‘Dallas,’ both on a cognitive and emotional level.

### **Media Framing and Its Most Common Messages**

At the heart of Cultivation research is the notion that heavier television viewers have perceptions of reality that more closely resemble the patterns and images of “television reality” than light television viewers. This theory is troubling because of the fact that “television reality” may not be entirely representative of reality. Foreign viewers, watching U.S. programming that mostly projects U.S. lifestyles, may not be able to watch (or identify) the diverse cultural, social, and political perspectives that exist in the U.S. and may be getting only a partial and incomplete glimpse of the reality of American society.

McCullah (2002) says in his book “Media Power” that the media are selective in the information it delivers about the events and issues in our world and also in how it

presents that information. Thus it “controls the information that is available to media audiences and so has the potential to shape or to set limits to their social knowledge and to the images that they construct of the world in which they live” (p. 22).

In media studies, the concept of agenda setting refers to “to the media’s capability, through repeated news coverage of raising the importance of an issue in the public’s mind” (Severin & Tankard, 2001, p. 219). It is a theory that posits an inherently causal relationship between media coverage of an issue and the public’s perception of that issue, which occurs over time and various cognitive steps. Media framing, on the other hand, deals with the thematically related attributes that are included in a particular media story about an issue or event. Therefore, the wording or explanation of an issue or concept by the media can influence how an individual perceives the different perspectives presented in a story (Scheufele, 2000).

Most agenda setting research, however, focuses on non-fictional television programming such as news coverage and not dramas and sitcoms. But research has shown that distinct patterns can also be identified in fictional programming. According to Fiske (1991), the economics of television production and distribution force it to appeal to the widest possible mass audience, which consists of many sub-cultures, and to the “variety of discourses that they will bring to bear upon the program in order to understand and enjoy it” (p. 37). Fiske indicates that producers must homogenize the variety of possible readings of the text while leaving some room for different readings to capture the greatest possible audience. Producers, he says, resolve this challenge by using the shared dominant ideology in a society and common television techniques that play into the common history and experience that all members of a society share. Fiske

maintains that producers accomplish all this in television by using a series of codes or “network of meanings that constitutes our cultural world” (4). The reality that television presents through the techniques of casting, setting, and costume, as well as the representational codes in the narrative (i.e. dialogue and action), also contain ideological codes that are understood by audiences because they represent the cultural codes of the society (pp. 4-12). The reward is “the easy pleasure of the recognition of the familiar and its adequacy” (p. 12).

Researchers in television have performed an innumerable amount of studies on the patterns of “reality” in television texts. Perhaps the best documented of these is television violence. Because of George Gerbner’s work in the Cultural Indicators project, connected to his work on Cultivation theory, statistics and research on television violence and crime have been kept for several decades. Gerbner (2002) says that adults are witness to a mean and violent world on television. About 31% of all characters and 52% of all major characters in television are involved in acts of violence as victims or victimizers. People belonging to a lower class, being Hispanic/Latino, or a woman of color are the most likely to kill or be killed (pp. 295-296). He adds that violence is the theme most found in 250 U.S. television programs exported abroad. Furthermore, about 46% of exported programs were crime/action series (p. 298). Signorielli (2003) says that her study of network prime time television found that 60% of all programs contain some violence. She adds “most programs do not show long-term consequences of violence, remorse, regret, or sanctions.”

In their study of protagonists on television Signorielli and Kahlenberg (2001) note that television over represents people that are professional, particularly those in law

enforcement (13.6 % of all characters), and under represents white (managerial, clerical) and blue collar (labor, factory) workers when the figures are compared to the statistics of the U.S. Census Bureau. She also found that whites were still more likely to have professional jobs than minorities on television. Single women were also more likely than married women to be working. Greenberg & Collete (1997) had previously found, by reading program synopses in TV Guide, that most men in programming were cast as professionals of some sort while women were cast as homemakers or unskilled labor, while Berg and Streckfuss (1992) found that typically female characters performed “more interpersonal/ relational actions and fewer decisional, political and operational actions than do male characters” (p. 201).

In analyzing the different classes that have been portrayed on network television from 1946-1990, Butsch (1992) found that working-class families comprised only 11% of all series. He notes that 70% of domestic sitcoms presented middle class families and that 44% of all series had a professional head of the house. These families were shown to be affluent and successful by their lifestyle, home, furnishings, and ability to form servants. Moreover, Butsch says that in the working-class sitcoms, the “humor is built around some variant of the working-class man’s stereotypic ineptitude, immaturity, stupidity, lack of good sense, or emotional outbursts,” (p. 391) while in middle class series men are the opposite. They are rational, responsible, and sensible. In both types of series, the woman is also mature, intelligent, rational and responsible. Jhally and Lewis (1992) say that “television in the United States, combines and implicit endorsement of certain middle class life styles with a squeamish refusal to confront class realities or class issues” (p. 74). They studied audience readings and interpretations of “the Cosby Show,”

and found that audiences tended to identify the Cosby family as proof that anyone, regardless of race, class, or creed, can achieve economic success.

Researchers have also studied how families are portrayed in television. In his book on television families, Douglas (2003) analyzes the extensive research on the subject. He says that although the nuclear family has become less common in U.S. society, television continues to present most families as a married couple with kids. He adds that demographically, television families are unlike real families. Furthermore, “they are rarely troubled by academic failure of children, poverty, spousal or child abuse, serious illness, and a host of other negative events that regularly permeate the experience of many real families” (p. 164). They mostly live in a suburb away from the city. Though women in television are more likely to work outside the home than in the past and men more frequently involved in domestic life and the rearing of children, traditional roles have mostly been kept. Women are shown to take care of the kids and be involved with meal preparation more than men, and were almost never shown to work full time. Men are more likely to solve family problems and discipline kids. Parents and kids seem involved, mutually respectful, and loving with each other. Douglas states, however, that disagreements and disputes in the family are common, particularly in working-class families, though these disputes are easily and amicably resolved. Sibling relations are also frequently hostile. Children seek reassurance, support, and depend on parents to resolve problems, all needs that are usually efficiently met by parents.

### **Active Audiences**

The second assumption in this study, a corollary to the first assumption, is that television texts are mediated by an “active” audience and that “the meanings programs have for viewers arise in the program/audience interaction” (Hagen and Wasko, 2000,

p.19). Mosco and Kaye (2000) point out that there is a strong debate in audience research about “whether the audience is best viewed as active or passive (and if so, how active or passive) as singular or plural, as a commodity, a form of labor, or as an ensemble of social practices” (p. 32) and if the best paradigm to study the audience is a postmodernist, political economy, or ethnographer one. Neuman (1982) puts it more succinctly: “Are individuals from diverse social and cultural backgrounds really responding in the same ways to these common cultural forms [of television]?”

In his chapter on Media Audiences in *Media, Communication, and Culture*, Lull(2000) describes the evolution of audience research and how perspectives about media effects have changed over time. Initially, he says audience researchers accepted that the electronic media were powerful and persuasive forces in society and believed that the task of the research “was simply to document the chain of influence as it moves from ‘sender’ to ‘receiver’ in order to measure effects” (p. 98). This direct effects model, then, analyzed a straightforward stimulus and response path similar to the one that was established between how exposure to the violent content of television stimulates aggressive behavior. The next stage of audience research came as a result of the inability of the direct effects model to explain the processes of mediated human communication, consciousness, and behavior. The limited-effects model of communication, in contrast to the direct effects model, didn’t see media as such a powerful force because of the intervening contextual forces inherent in a system of ‘sender’ and ‘receiver.’ Consequently, audiences were believed to have varying social relationships that helped them to mediate the messages in the media, including vast amounts of cultural influences.

A strain of audience theory that valued the audience's multi-faceted use of media was the Uses and Gratifications model. Researchers moved away from traditional effects model, focusing instead on functional perspectives from the audiences' point of view. Rubin (1994) explains that Uses and Gratifications model assumed that people are active participants in selecting media messages, are goal-oriented in selecting the message (obtaining gratification from the medium of choice), and are aware that their choices have consequences. He also suggests that media use could be described in two ways: "ritualized use" involves a habitual use of the medium for diversion while "instrumental use" involves the use of media for information depending on the user's motivation.

Critics, according to Rubin, claim that the Uses and Gratifications model focuses too much on the individual and make it difficult to predict overall patterns of media use and the societal implications that this may have (p. 423). In talking about mass audiences, understood as groups of people who may share media-related behavior, Lull (2000) acknowledges the possibility that mass audiences have the potential to engage in collective behavior and perceptions heavily influenced and persuaded by the media (pp. 112-116). But the full potential of mass audience, Lull says, has been fragmented and narrowed due to the rapid expansion of electronic broadcasting (i.e. satellite television and the Internet) and the creation of market segmentation and diverse content by media executives and advertisers with financial stakes (p. 123). In a world where the global communications media are largely dominated by American-style marketing and content,

as previously discussed, mass audiences are still largely exposed to the American ideals, beliefs, and values broadcast across various media. Lull (2000) believes, however, that

although popular culture forms such as TV shows, movies, and pop music clearly express particular cultural values, these popular forms and values are never simply received, digested, and acted upon in any uniform way by their global audiences. . . they are mediated critically and appropriated socially and culturally in the context they enter. (p. 230)

One of the models this study uses is in terms of the interaction between audience and television texts is the “preferred readings” model in Hall’s (1980) “Decoding and Encoding” essay. While the electronic media originate programming with a specific discourse and purpose, Hall says, the programming also carries encoded messages with a wider socio-cultural and political structure. Though the code can have multiple connotative meanings, the most common way it is decoded by an audience, according to Hall, is along a dominant and hegemonic cultural order that has “the institutional/political/ideological order imprinted on them and have themselves become institutionalized” (p. 134). But this reading of the encoded messages isn’t necessarily the only possibility. A negotiated interpretation and an oppositional interpretation of texts are also possible. The negotiated version acknowledges hegemonic definitions but also negotiates the process of decoding by also counting situated or local conditions and logics. The oppositional version completely reclassifies the message within an alternative framework. The key difference between Hall's model and the Uses and Gratifications model is that Hall seems to imply that audiences are exposed to the pervasive media almost involuntary. The Uses and Gratifications model assumes that audiences voluntarily access media to fulfill different needs.

It is important to keep in mind, as Morley (1993) points out, that it is wrong to assume that “the majority of audience members routinely modify or deflect any dominant

ideology reflected in media (p. 13) as well as to conclude that resistance is more widespread than subordination to a dominant reading, which has become a tendency in Active Audience analysis (p. 14).

### **Human Information Processing and Social Learning**

Audience analysis has sought, then, to understand how individuals cognitively process, filter, and organize the media texts with which they interact. Cultivation research, for one, does not generally look to answer *how* or *why* television audiences interpret television messages in the way that they do. As Shrum (1995) says, “the understanding of an effect is not complete unless one can articulate the process (es) by which the effect occurs” (p. 402). The author goes on to employ social cognitive theory to explain Cultivation in terms of how individual estimates quantitative estimates about people, behaviors, or other objects in the real world. The answer to “How many lawyers are dishonest?” is an example of a “first-order judgment,” he says. An individual can employ several techniques to answer the question: count all the instances of a phenomenon, consider all the information available to him or her, and weigh and balance each one to decide on a judgment; recall several instances or experiences of the phenomenon or just the most recent examples and then make a judgment; or just fit particular instances that fit a preconceived notion of the phenomenon in question. Shrum says that technique employed to answer the question, each differing from the other in the cognitive effort it requires, depends on conditions such as time pressure as well as the implications the question has for the respondent. The individuals in Cultivation research whose perceptions of reality most reflect “television reality” (i.e. heavy viewers), according to Shrum, may be utilizing the technique that requires the least

cognitive effort to make judgments and thus, are basing these judgments on the frequency, recency, vividness, and distinctiveness of the phenomenon on television.

Shapiro and Lang (1991) focus more on the psycho-physiological processes that affect the way reality is construed and how television stimuli affect that process. The authors are interested, in particular, with how and why event memories are stored, retrieved, and given value in relationship to reality. In their model, the researchers believe that high-order processes such as decision-making and information gathering are initiated by low-order responses such as orienting (i.e. something new or novel), startle, and defensive responses. Mediated reality, such as a television murder, force high-order process to “make sense” of the event after they have been triggered by the low-order responses. An individual then builds contextual information such as physiological states, communication source, and judgments about the similarities to reality about that event, which is then stored in memory. The automatic and unconscious process by which the contextual information is organized is prone to be forgotten, dissociated, dampened, or intensified with time. Since the contextual information of television memories may be similar to the contextual information of real events, social reality decisions may be more influenced by television event memories than from memories from other sources.

In his study on television reception Hoijer (1992) examined three interacting cognitive processes and how they influence the interpretation of television texts. Through in-depth interview, Hoijer wanted to see how participants used interpretive cognitive schema in analyzing a television program about HIV patients and their medical care. He found that viewers focused and spoke most about the themes that were psychologically close to them and their experiences. While some participants talked

broadly about the struggle with death and sickness, others, like a female nurse and an insurance agent talked about issues that were closer to their professions and education. Other participants gave longer answers about their own personal experiences in dealing with diseases and going to hospitals. Hoijer hypothesized that each participant would use one of three cognitive schemata: One that highlighted the shared universal experiences that humans share, one that was shaped by socio-cultural experiences that were products of a specific society, or one that was given meaning by private experiences that were unique to an individual. His study is a clear example that, as he says himself, there is no clear demarcation line between each realm of experience.

Hoijer's study talks about the socially founded cognitive structures that "form a complex network, some parts deep in our unconscious and other parts more accessible to our conscious mind" (p. 586) that "are a microcosm of universal, socio-cultural, and private worlds shaped by social interaction with others and the environment and interpreted by the individual" (p. 587). The individual, he insists, constructs meaning out of media texts using his/her own cognitive structures. Entman and Rojecki (2000) believe very definitive cognitive structures explain how and why White-American audiences interpret certain messages about African-Americans in a particular way. They say that both the need for cognitive economy, as Shrum (1995) suggested, as well as cultural influences have a defining role in the way an audience interprets a text.

Schema, Entman and Rojecki (2000) say, are interconnected concepts about the world (i.e. knowledge) that each individual has organized in his mind and allow him to make inferences about any new information that is presented to him. Furthermore, these schemata reflect "judgments of value while hoping to impose a kind of mental order on

an unstable world” (p. 48). Similarly, media texts and public discourse make use of structures similar to schemata, which are called frames, that “highlight and link data selectively to tell more or less coherent stories that define problems, diagnose causes, make moral judgments, and suggest remedies” (p. 49). The key feature of media frames, Entman and Rojecki imply, are that they selectively present information that prompt an audiences’ schematic understanding about that information. According to the authors, the most common schemata that individuals in a society share and the most common media frames define that society’s mainstream culture.

In their study of how and why White-Americans perceive Black-Americans in the way they do, Entman and Rojecki say that schema and framing are very influential. They say a schema of what is safe and dangerous is distinguished in large part by what a person considers to be his or her own culture and what is an out-culture. The more valued traits belong to the “us” group while the less valued belong to the “them” group. Media frames, they go on to suggest, tend to reflect this schema in presenting an idealized body type, communication behavior, and achievement status, and other series of traits that tend to leave Blacks on the outside. These traits, Entman and Rojecki note, are “perceived by most Whites as representing the realm of disorder and perhaps danger” (p. 51).

The concept of schemata was initially used in cognitive psychology and refers to the brain’s “representation of an event, often combined with features of the accompanying context, which retains, to varying degrees, the patterned features of the event” (Kagan, 2002, p. 27). It emerges from brain activity resulting from the sensory event. Kagan identifies two types of schemata: those resulting from visceral reactions in

sensory receptors, which then are represented symbolically (i.e. unpleasant or pleasant), and those perceptual schemata that derive from external events around an individual. Newborns, he goes on to say, are born with selective attention for things such as circular forms, moving objects, and contoured fields and thus are prepared to build certain schemata for making sense of the world early on (p. 33). Humans, Neisser (1976) noted, cannot and do not process all the stimuli that they encounter in their daily lives and need to selectively attend to perception. While schemata work to filter incoming information, during certain moments, different schemata compete to make sense of a phenomenon (pp. 79-81).

Three general classes of schemata deal with structuring how the social world works according to Taylor and Crocker (1981). One schema deals with personalities and prototypic conceptions about the behavior of these personalities. Another schemata deals with the social roles that individuals should have, which includes such things as occupational roles, family roles, and even the stereotypical roles of social groups. A third is an event schema for particular circumstances like a party and the behavior they entail. Event schemata also function as tools to recognize and make sense of stories.

Schemata, which Entman and Rojecki (2000) say simultaneously define “mainstream culture” and also exist as a result of that culture, can be probed in order to understand how individuals understand the social world in which they exist. Graber (1988) indicates that schema come from many places. They are acquired not only through operant conditioning and overt teaching but also from imitation. The socialization of individuals, imprinted with the cultural values of the particular society he or she lives in, teaches individuals detailed ideas about appropriate behavior and social

roles in different circumstances, the purpose of life, and even social judgments of what is good and evil. Information systems such as television and newspapers also reflect these cultural values (pp.184-185).

In her study of the way individuals process political information Graber (1988) selected 21 individuals and conducted a yearlong schema analysis. Concurrently to the in-depth interviews, the researcher conducted a content analysis of the stories that were appearing in media such as television and newspapers. She identified six different dimensions in their schemata to process news. The most common was (1) “cause and effect sequences” in which “news stories are readily incorporated into existing schemata if the facts they report constitute a predictable outcome of familiar current situations” (p. 194). Another way of processing was (2) “simple situation sequences” in which individuals could only recount the bare essentials of factual recurrences and often had factual errors. A third dimension involved use of schemata dealing with (3) cultural norms and “American interests” such as saying “that is the American way.” These were often used to judge the actions in news stories and the conduct of the subjects in those stories. Other schemata involved recognizing and making judgments about the (4) behavior of people and (5) institutions. A final dimension involved the use of empathy and human interest schemata that made certain stories more salient to the participants if they had relevance to their daily personal jobs or general interests.

The Graber study tried to both contextualize how participants understand the world and, simultaneously, execute a content analysis of the news media stories that surrounded the participants during the time of the study. As discussed previously, the meaning that audiences find in media texts are the result of the interaction between the framing

potentiality of a television text and the way that an audience member conceptualizes the world. It has already been noted that the way he or she interprets a particular text depends in part “on background knowledge of an experiential or socio-cognitive kind, activated in the reading process” and also “on the broader ideological, socio-cultural and institutional frames that constitute the setting for our reading of it” (MacLachlan and Reid, 1994, pg. 108).

### **Research Questions**

The study examined how a Nicaraguan audience, in coming to conclusions about U.S. society and lifestyles, decodes the messages in U.S. television texts and more importantly, *how* and *why* individuals negotiate certain readings of the encoded messages along their own logic situated in Nicaraguan culture. With this in mind, the following research questions were posed:

(1) What are the perceptions that the Nicaraguan individuals in the study have of the U.S. in terms of U.S. family life, socio-economic status, violence/law enforcement, job opportunities, and leisure activities?

Since Cultivation theory and other media research suggest that television viewers gain perceptions of the world that more closely resemble the content of the television programming than the real world, the second research questions is concerned with the way that U.S. produced television programming may be affecting how Nicaraguan individuals perceive the U.S:

(2) How are U.S.-produced television programs affecting the way Nicaraguan individuals perceive the U.S. (in terms of family life, socio-economic status, violence/law enforcement, job opportunities, and leisure activities)?

This study research sought to identify specific American sitcoms, dramas, and other television programming that were contributing particular messages about U.S. lifestyles.

So a corollary question is:

(3) What specific U.S. shows contribute to the way Nicaraguan individuals perceive U.S. lifestyles and what specific messages about U.S. lifestyles are they providing?

The fourth research question is concerned with how Nicaraguan individuals, as audience members, engage with the U.S. television texts they are watching. It is preoccupied with investigating what established knowledge about the U.S., schematic structures, and frames were being used by the participants in their interpretation of the texts, with particular emphasis on how Nicaraguan culture influences that interpretation:

(4) What personal and macro-social factors (i.e. Nicaraguan socio-cultural and economic factors) influence how the U.S. television texts are being interpreted?

A corollary to this research question addresses the immediate similarities and differences between the two societies and how the Nicaraguan reality may influence how the U.S. is perceived:

(5) What are the similarities and differences between the perceived U.S. lifestyles and the perceived Nicaraguan lifestyles?

## CHAPTER 3 METHODS

The purpose of this study was to determine *how* television texts produced in the United are influencing perceptions about the U.S. The study does not assume that U.S. television programming is working to create perceptions in a vacuum where no such perception exist independently of television, but that television, in fact, works among a series of mediated experiences, including interpersonal communication and/or other media such as newspapers and radio, that have created all sorts of opinions about the U.S. It is thus necessary to also examine *what* the perceptions, in general, are about U.S. society and the role television is playing in those perceptions. Because the study is also concerned with how the audience negotiates the particular messages in the television texts based on their own local conditions, it is also necessary to investigate *how* Nicaraguan culture is influencing the interpretation of the television programming as well as *how* Nicaraguan society compares and contrasts to the U.S. society. Most importantly, the study is concerned with identifying how specific fictional programs such as sitcoms and dramas are influencing the perceptions about the U.S.

The research design borrows from heavily from Graber's (1988) microanalysis- an intensive study of a small number of people- of how Americans process political information. She asserts that in-depth interviews have four distinct advantages. They are discursive in that they allow the interviewer to study the "structural relationships among assertions and provides insights into the existence and nature of belief systems"

(p. 19). They are dialectical and allow the researcher to probe deeper into the responses and ideas being expressed by the participant, which adds value to the data that is being gathered. Third, they are biographical, which allows the participants to share their personal experiences and thoughts. Finally, they can be recorded to provide an accurate textual account. For the purposes of this study, in-depth interviews were a vehicle for identifying specific U.S. television programs, the specific messages these texts are transmitting, and how these contribute to the perceptions that Nicaraguans have of the U.S.

In-depth interviews were conducted separately with 13 participants aged between 20 and 24. Individuals from this age range were selected because it is believed that they would both watch the most hours of television *and* be the most able to discuss, remember, and decode the messages of the television programs they have watched. Nine of the participants were from Leon, one of the largest cities in Nicaragua. The other four participants were from the smaller towns of Esteli, Rivas, and Masaya. Most of the participants were recruited in Leon because it is considered a college town, allowing easier access to participants, and also because it was believed to represent mid-point between the bigger cities like the capital Managua and the thousands of little “purebloods” that constitute Nicaragua. [For a brief background on the participants see Appendix C]

The in-depth interviews took place in the summer of 2003 and were performed in Spanish. Time and money restrictions allowed only 13 individuals to be chosen. Participants were first selected on the basis that they had never traveled to the United States and upon their exposure to first-person accounts of life in the U.S. Interpersonal

communication between the participants and persons who've been to the U.S. was believed to have been a main source of information about the U.S. Thus care was taken to recruit participants with different degrees of interpersonal contact with these "travelers" and to record which opinions were based on these sources. Economic background, education, and viewing habits (hours of television watched) were also considered when selecting the participants. The participants were repeatedly asked to explain how and why they had the views, attitudes, and perceptions about the U.S. that they had.

The series of questions was divided into four different parts. The first part asked the participants to give brief personal background. That series of questions was followed by questions about each individual's viewing habits and they're like or dislike for U.S. programming, as well as the differences they saw in the production value of different programming on television.

Next, the series of questions turned to asking the participants about they're perceptions about the U.S. This series of questions dealt with areas that most Cultivation researchers have studied in the past. The question focused on five broad categories (see Appendix D for the Questionnaire). The first category involved questions about the work opportunities/type of jobs that were available in the U.S. In this set of questions, participants were asked about the most common jobs in the U.S. and whether there were more job opportunities in the U.S. than Nicaragua. The second category asked about the amount of violence/ police presence in the U.S. This set of questions asked about the most common crimes in the U.S. and in Nicaragua and the proportion of cops to residents in each country. The third set of questions interrogated the inter-relationships inside the

family unit (adult/ adult and adult/children). Participants were asked about how children were raised and the values that were taught. Questions about the leisure activities of Americans, such as what Americans do on weekends and how American social gatherings were different than Nicaraguan parties comprised the fourth area. Finally, the fifth set of questions asked about the socio-economic system in both countries and the importance of race and gender. The participants were asked to identify whether the class system was more marked in the U.S. or in Nicaragua, and how an individual's race, ethnicity, and gender might influence his/her place in that system.

The final series of questions asked about specific programs and characters that had been mentioned by the participant during the course of the interview. The participants were probed on the interpretations they had of each show, why they liked or didn't like about the show, and what the show taught them about U.S. values.

The analysis of the data presented in the discussion is divided along the five categories that have previously been mentioned: job opportunities, violence, family values, socio-economic status, and leisure activities. For the most part, the first part of each section deals with the opinions that the participants have about that particular aspect of life in the U.S. That is then followed by the similarities and differences between both countries as identified by the participants. Next, the source of the participant's opinions is discussed as well as the particular U.S. programs, if any, which were influential in those conclusions. .

Hall's (1980) Encoding/Decoding model suggests that while television texts have specific messages with a wider socio-cultural and political structure, these messages can have multiple connotative meanings depending on how the texts is decoded by an

audience. The analysis, then, is also complimented with research on both the macro-social and economic factors that influence the way the individuals interpret the texts.

## CHAPTER 4 FINDINGS

### **The Participants**

Yeny, 21, is a law student who watches about 13 hours of television a week. She enjoyed programming that showed the importance of family and “the humanity of everyday living.”

Jaromir, 23, is a medical student who likes to watch sports and music videos as well as dramas that deal with medicine. Several of his siblings live in the United States.

Mariela, 21, is a law student that is an avid watcher of American television programming. Some of her family members including her dad have visited the U.S.

Noemy, 22, is a psychology student who lives most of her time in Managua. She does not watch much television during the week but has an affinity for the international news programs on Univision.

Carlos, 21, is a medical student in Leon who does not know anyone that has been to the U.S. He likes to watch action movies as well as sitcoms.

Arnoldo, 22, is studying dentistry and watches about 15 hours a week of television. He has cousins and friends who have been to the U.S. and have shared their travel experiences with him.

Evila, 21, is a medical student who is married and has a daughter. She has traveled to other Central American countries but never to the U.S. Her dad lives in the U.S.

Maria Jose, 22, was born in Leon and is studying to be a clinical analyst. She watches only about 10 hours of television a week but based many of her opinions on what she had seen on television.

Marcelo, 23, is studying International Relations. He keeps up-to-date on international news and also enjoys programming that is “educational.”

Cora Ena, 21, is studying to become a physiotherapist. Her dad lives on the U.S. and experienced a lot of hardships when he moved. She watches about 40 hours of television a week.

Wilberth, 23, finished high school and was working as an insurance salesman. He knew several people that had been to the States. He believed that there was too much U.S. programming in the over-the-air channels.

Rosa, 24, was born in Leon and was studying to obtain her degree in Business Administration. She watched the least amount of television and American programming of all the interviewees.

Guillermo, 23, is a pharmacy student who watches about 40 hours of television a week. He likes to watch a lot of news programs as well as fictional television. His mom has been to the U.S.

### **Job Opportunities**

The job opportunities available in the United States were the characteristic that was most attractive to the participants, particularly because of the stark contrast between the U.S. and Nicaragua in that regard. For the most part, television was not the main influence that shaped how the participants thought about job opportunities in the U.S.

Most of the participants acknowledged that the economic resourcefulness of the U.S. would be the main reason why they would want to live in the U.S. Jaromir, a 5<sup>th</sup>

year medical student, said he believed the U.S. is an industrialized nation that is concerned with the progress of business and helps everyone by setting good economic policies.

“Generally the government here in Nicaragua directs its economic policies towards foreign investment,” Jaromir stated. “They facilitate a lot of things. Give them many benefits. The national industries, then, suffer a little more. They have more restrictions...Here in Nicaragua what they [national industries] have to do is lower its employee numbers, its stores. So all that leads to lower employee numbers. I see that the U.S., without taking into account the situation of the last 5 years, I think that all the industries have way more support. They have easier time expanding.”

Yeny, a 21-year old from Esteli, echoed Jaromir’s feelings about the differences between the two countries. She said that she believed that the U.S. is superior economically because it created jobs not only for labor but also for professionals who are university graduates.

“The manufacturing centers also need managers, administrators, supervisors, secretaries. That not only generates jobs for the non-specialized or non-university education sector but also for the superiors, the professionals, those who took out a career. There are centers that employ all the job sectors. Here it is very difficult to find a job as a professional.”

Both Yeny and Jaromir relied heavily on the opinions of family members who were living or had traveled to the U.S. While news shows did reinforce some of their ideas their conclusions were based mostly on the experiences and opinions of others.

Of the 10 respondents that gave percentages of the type of work that can be found in the U.S., 7 of them said between 50-70% of all Americans were professionals. Rosa, 24, said that almost 80% of the population that were professionals. She was the participant that watched the least amount of American television. The high percentages may be attributed to the fact that the participants seemed to include what would normally be called “white-collar jobs” as professional jobs (i.e. jobs requiring a university degree or technical training).

Jaromir believed that that people that were not professionals in the U.S faced rigorous supervision and licensing by the government, unlike in Nicaragua. He implied that this type of supervision and certification was so minimal in Nicaragua that if Nicaragua ever practiced a similar process of authorization and evaluation many people would immediately jump into the category of “professionals” in Nicaragua. He based his opinions on this subject on the information that had been passed along by relatives in the U.S. more than the news shows that he tuned in to.

In 2001, the unemployment rate in Nicaragua was 11.3% and the underemployment rate was at almost 35% (UNHDR, 2002, p. 84). The Latin American and Caribbean Statistics Yearbook (CEPAL, 2003) also shows that in Nicaragua the unemployment rate goes up as the number of years of schooling a person receives also goes up (p. 30). The UNHDR (2002) also notes that the informal sector of merchants, shopkeepers, and other independent workers (i.e. non-salaried workers) has gone up over the last 10 years (p. 84). The parents of many of the participants belong to this independent sector which undoubtedly influences how they view the issue of work.

The participants, however, saw that the issue of job opportunities in the U.S. mainly from the point of view of Hispanic immigrants and the hardships that they faced in the U.S. Many of them had immediate relatives that lived or traveled to the U.S. regularly. All of the participants mentioned that the few jobs and high unemployment rate in Nicaragua made it necessary for people to go look for jobs in the U.S. Today about 180,000 Nicaraguans have emigrated to the U.S. (p.34).

“In the U.S. there are more opportunities for a professional to practice his career,” Guillermo, 23, asserted. “But here, it isn’t a rare case to find people who’ve earned an engineering degree, or any degree, who end up in jobs selling things or selling lotteries on the street. Sadly, the percentage of jobs in Nicaragua is little, so it doesn’t permit people who earn degrees in engineering or other careers to work in those things. In the U.S., I would say there are more jobs, stronger industries for professionals to work in.”

“I know a doctor who was very prestigious here in Leon who went over there to wash dishes,” Wilberth, 22, recounted. “For a Hispanic finding a job over there, he knows that he is going to work in whatever he finds.”

Cora Ena’s father, who currently resides in the U.S., initially stayed at a shelter when he arrived in Los Angeles where he washed cars before working in a restaurant. He’s told me, she said, that life is very hard over there and very agitated. He hardly has time to do anything else but to rest when he is not working, she added

For many Hispanics, according to Noemy, that means finding jobs as “domestic help.” She said she believed 25% of the people in the U.S. worked as “domestic help.” She added that a professional in Nicaragua started in a “lowly job” in the U.S. but even that lowly job was better paid than one in Nicaragua.

Carlos, 21, said that television and movies show that even a person with a “lowly job” has a bigger and better house than anyone in Nicaragua could have. This leads him to conclude that the quality of life is considerably better in the U.S. than in Nicaragua

Television news, in particular the ones broadcast on Univision, the largest Spanish-language network in the U.S. reinforced some of the first-person accounts of immigrants.”

“I’ve seen in the news on Univision, that if you go and work over in the U.S. you’re not going to have a good position because you’re an immigrant. You’re going to paint, be a mechanic, or sell fruit. Even the police, Cora Ena, 21, said, treat people badly because they are Hispanic.”

Noemy had so much faith in the Univision news show that she said she admired both Jorge Ramos and Maria Elena Salinas, the anchors of Univision’s international news program

The participants, however, saw those who live in the U.S. as having great opportunities, basing most of their conclusions on what they watch on news programs like CNN International and other shows. Eight of the participants cited some form of news program as the basis of their conclusion. Wilberth, 23, for instance, watches only about 14 hours a week of television, but cited the news when he spoke very passionately about his beliefs regarding the opportunities of U.S. citizens.

“I am more than sure that people who were born over there, or who are U.S. citizens, or have lived over there for many years, or have been raised over there, if they have taken advantage of their time have had a good education and good job,” Miguel

said. “Any person, you see, who went to a prestigious university in the U.S. occupies a good job and has the access to good jobs.”

He also believed that 60 to 70% of Americans are professionals such as doctors, lawyers, and engineers. He cited “many reports that have been presented” to support the notion that the opportunities for good education and good jobs exist for U.S. citizens.

Interestingly enough, he didn’t see the show “Married With Children,” a sitcom about a relatively poor family where only the father has a job, as being representative of life in U.S. but more as an example of what happens when opportunities for education are wasted.

Similarly, Guillermo, 23, who professed to watch the news as soon as he gets up at six to go to work (as part of the almost 40 hours that he watches a week), was very confident that at least 85% of those who earned a degree out of college worked, after graduation, in the same field as the one in which they studied. He cited news reports as the basis of his conclusions, identifying the unemployment rate in the U.S. was 6%. He was right according to the Time Almanac (2005, p. 625).

“I believe that if there is an unemployment that low then the people are working,” he said.

Arnoldo, 22, pointed out that television shows that “an American has had had all the opportunities...The state gives priority to these Americans. Similarly, Evila said that typically Americans have economic stability and can aspire to university educations and better things, while a Hispanic is often struggling and can’t afford a university.

On the negative side, however, all the participants saw that working life in the U.S. was more stressful and agitated than in Nicaragua. Carlos, for instance, said that television including news shows had contributed to this image of a working professional:

“Generally, you can note that a professional is completely dedicated to his job . . . You can see that his job comes first and then comes everything else. And that if it is necessary to work all 24 hours in a given day, that person is willing to do it so long as it means that he can sustain his economic level and better himself. You can also see that a certain level of responsibility is required because you can note that a lot is expected of the person, more even than what he is capable of doing.”

While none of the respondents identified any fictional dramas or sitcoms that influenced their general perception of the most common jobs in the U.S. or the percentages in each sector (i.e. professional, blue collar, white collar), these types of programs did have a huge influence in teaching them about three different areas: medicine, law, and law enforcement.

Mariela, 21, who is a 5<sup>th</sup> year law student, talked at length about her favorite shows, which included crime drama shows like “CSI”, “Law and Order”, and “The Practice.” She believed that 20% of the population studies and works as lawyers in the U.S.

“In the U.S. everything needs lawyers,” she stated. “Any little thing needs lawyers. In an accident the first one there beside a doctor is a lawyer. To build a house, for contracts, for sales...in an operation that goes wrong or any type of hospital negligence the first thing you see is a lawsuit because of who. They resolve your conflicts, even in between family members. “

She based her conclusion, at least partially, on “The Practice,” a drama series that follows the lives and cases of defense attorneys in a Boston firm, and the way it presents the American law system.

“What I like about ‘The Practice’ is the energy,” she said. “How it shows the energy with which a lawyer defends his client. I like that everything you allege you go and investigate the witnesses. I don’t know if that’s how it is in the U.S. But here in the U.S. it is not like that.”

Yeny, another law student, said she liked “Ally McBeal”, a sitcom about another lawyer, because it showcased a strong independent women, it involved her career, and “also presented the criminal, penal, and civil legal procedures that were used in the U.S.”

Several participants also talked about medical shows like “E.R,” “Precinct Med,” and others found on “Discovery Health.” Maria Jose, 22, a clinical analysis student, says that she’s seen in Discovery Health how everything is much easier for doctors in the U.S. and how technology allows them to do things that can’t be done in Nicaragua.

“That is why I like it. There are things that we kill ourselves doing here and there [in the u.s.] they do it so easy by using a machine” She also felt this was related to that the fact that “the doctor is more humane, relates more with patient. Here [in Nicaragua] it is not like that. That is the impression that television gives me.

Evila, a medical student also praised the shows on the “Discovery Health” channel. She said that the channel showed her how different the treatments are in the U.S. and that it also motivated her to always keep learning.

Jaromir, another medical student like Maria Jose, said that shows like “E.R.,” which follows the lives of Chicago Emergency Room doctors in and out of the hospital, showed him the differences in technology between the two countries.

“That’s what I like about ‘E.R.’, that it shows situations in which you can see that they resolve things because they have a lot of doctors and you think, well, here I would have done it in a different manner because I don’t have that, for instance, to give you an example, magnetic resonance at an instant, or an axial tomography at an instant. You don’t have a mobile ultrasound unit to examine at an instance. Many times the X-ray units are not in good condition nor are there resources to use them in Nicaragua.”

On the negative side, Jaromir said that “E.R.” showed him the administrative policies of the health system in the U.S., where he saw that if you don’t have the economic resources you don’t have good access to health care.”

### **Violence and Law Enforcement**

The responses to the set of questions focusing on violence and the police in the U.S. seemed to be most influenced by television programming. Crime dramas like “NYPD Blue,” “Due South,” “CSI,” “Baywatch,” and even “Medical Detectives,” a show on “Discovery Channel,” had very definite influences on the way the participants of the study understood the police.

In general, the participants agreed that there were more violent types of crimes in the U.S. than there were in Nicaragua. Emblematic of the way that the students viewed the differences in violence between the two countries was Marcelo’s statement that “In Nicaragua, we respect the right to die a little.”

“There is more violence over there,” Maria Jose said. “There is violence here. Every now and then you hear of a rape, of a stabbing, or about gangs. But a gang here is

nothing to one over there. Over there you hear about gang wars, of women disappeared, kidnappings, drownings . . . there is just more violence. The acts of cruelty are more over there.”

Mariela said that the most common type of crimes in the U.S. were homicides while in Nicaragua the most common type of crimes were robberies. Yeny thought that crime was high, extreme, and abundant in both places, but that while a crime in Nicaragua was done with a machete the same crime done carried out with a chainsaw in the U.S.

Jaromir pointed out that the use of firearms was more common in the U.S. He said that it was common to have gang warfare with firearms in the U.S. while in Nicaragua it was common to see interfamily violence like the ones between married couples.

A comparison of the statistics shows that the U.S., in general, is more violent than Nicaragua. The crime rate, however, has been going down significantly in the U.S. while it has been increasing in Nicaragua. (UNHDR, 2003, p. 163, 35 & Time Almanac, 2005, p. 386)

Noemy believed that different factors influence the amount of violence in both countries. She believed that the liberties and opportunities that were available to individuals in the U.S. led them to such things as gangs and drug use. In Nicaragua, she felt that “one single factor motivates everybody: the economic factor. The few opportunities available to the young, consequently, force them to resort to delinquency.

Carlos saw the motivations for crime in the U.S. differently.

“I think that the population, that the ideology that every person has is very individualistic and leads him to that [crime]. That is why crime is a little more extensive

in that sense...it's like the people want more and more and more. They do anything to obtain things. So all this contributes to, it gets more extensive. One infects the other. Another infects another.

Wilberth pointed out that shows like "New York Undercover," a crime drama, and "Primer Impacto," a sensationalistic news show on Univision, show him the other side of the U.S., "a side that is not the typical nice, happy images of beaches and people having fun". In these types of shows he gets to see things like homicides, drug trafficking, arms dealing, and the mafia.

Guillermo, on the other hand, mentioned "Medical Detectives." a forensics show on Discovery channel when he was asked about violence in the U.S. He reasoned that if the process of catching criminals has been perfected the way it is shown in "Medical Detectives," then there must be a lot of criminals and planned crimes like homicides and disembodiments.

It is noteworthy that almost all of the participants repeatedly emphasized the amount of gang activity that they perceived in the U.S. The students felt that in Nicaragua people can sit outside their porches to talk to friends and neighbors, but that in the U.S. this was impossible partly because of the violence and gang activity on the streets.

Cora Ena, who based her conclusions about the U.S. on what her father had recounted about the country and what she had seen in the news, thought that a person could not walk down the street calmly or go out at night for fear of gangs. Gangs, she said, have drive-by shootings or harass businesses and homes to no end. She admitted that she knew mostly about life in Los Angeles but thought the gangs were common all

over the U.S. because of the images she saw on shows like Univision's "Primer Impacto."

"There are gangs everywhere," she said. "But here they don't have guns. Here they get you with a sling blade or something rustic...because the gang members over there have more money or more access...and supply arms and everything else they need."

Out of all the participants only Arnoldo firmly believed that Nicaragua had more violence than the U.S. because security isn't as good in Nicaragua.

"If Nicaragua had the size of the U.S. it would be super violent," he said. "There would be so much more violence...In the U.S. the society has been better educated at conserving themselves and have the security measures. That isn't true here."

Arnold added that he's seen measures, such as fingerprinting, that are taken to solve crimes on Discovery Channel that don't exist in Nicaragua.

Arnoldo's point is one that was shared by all the participants. Nowhere is the difference greater between the U.S. and Nicaragua, according to the participants, than in the way the police functions.

Four of the eight participants who responded when asked to give the ratio of cops to citizens answered that about 40 -60 % of the people in the U.S. worked in law enforcement. But the numbers were all over the place. Several thought it was between 1-10%. In Nicaragua the respondents gave numbers that were either below 1% or between 15-20%.

Mariela, born and raised in Leon, did not give a percentage but reasoned that there weren't even 100 cops in all of Leon, which led her to believe there weren't 5,000 cops in the entire country.

In fact, there are about 13 police officers per 10,000 inhabitants ( or approximately 0.13% of population) in Nicaragua and 24 police officers per 10,000 in Nicaragua (or approximately 0.24% of population) (UNHDR, 2003, p. 163 & United States Department of Labor<sup>1</sup>, 2003)

When asked about the differences in the police forces of both countries Jaromir thought that violence might actually be lower in the U.S. because of the efficiency and resources of law enforcement.

“The information system is better over there,” he said. “Data exists with which one can act quickly. Let me mention, the CIA, for instance, the FBI, the military. There is the local police or the state police. So we are talking about four types of authorities or police to defend against crime... You also have action corps that are part of the military like the SWAT, I think they are called, I’m not sure, who also help fight against crime. Here in Nicaragua there is the police and only the police.

Guillermo said that someone who is a policeman in Nicaragua is someone who has “nothing better to do.” In the U.S., he thought, the police had minimum standards for height and weight, and received special training not found in Nicaragua.

Cora Ena agreed that the training in Nicaragua is minimal and that even people who had only studied up to the 6<sup>th</sup> grade could join the police force. In many ways, she said, this was the reason why some cops were always looking for a scam.

Because of the detective shows that he watched on the “Discovery Channel”, Guillermo also thought that: “Over there they count on technology to resolve the doubts

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<sup>1</sup> The U.S. figure is obtained by adding the number of police and sheriff's patrol officers, transit and railroad police officers, and police/detectives managers in the U.S. Department of Labor statistics. It does not include a host of other occupations involved with law enforcement identified by the Labor Department.

they have. Here they couldn't solve a crime with just a piece of hair that is found...the closest thing that resembles that over here is finger printing. But sadly, there is no database of all the fingerprints of all the citizens of Nicaragua.”

“I like how they proceed in their investigations,” Arnoldo said about the protagonists in “CSI,” another crime drama, and “Medical Detectives. “How they go about making conjectures about how things happened in a case. There is a lot of technology to know, to solve. That is what I like about the U.S. They don't solve it 100%. But I like that they have sufficient technology to go step by step to find the evidence that they need. Cora Ena, Jaromir, Mariela, and Guillermo each noted how they have watched police chases on programs, movies, and news, where one car is being chased by dozens of police cars.

“Here there isn't even gasoline,” Cora Ena said. “If you want to chase someone who stole your bike you have to pay the gasoline of their piece of junk car. They say the state doesn't pay them enough to cover gas and so you have to pay them.”

Other participants like Mariela and Jaromir also complained that the cops were unwilling to act because of lack of gas.

Jaromir sardonically added that the cops in Nicaragua don't show up at a crime scene until there is dead body or until the people themselves have resolved a problem.

Because the government has more money, the police have more support in the U.S., Wilberth said. He added that he has noticed in the news that there is a large presence of lifeguards at the beach and that the emergency number 9-1-1 can be accessed and trusted by any citizen.

The conversation with Wilberth at that moment turned from the news programming to “Baywatch,” a drama that follows the lives of California lifeguards.

“So a guy is drowning and a pickup truck parks and gives him first aid,” he muttered. “Then someone else comes. Another boat also passes by. Three other boats encircle someone else that’s drowning. Another three jet skis help out the others, and then there’s also the helicopters . . . if that had been here, he drowns, he drowns immediately because there isn’t that type of service.”

Cora Ena admired the work of the police she that she sees in “Baywatch” and “Due South,” another police series that is set in Chicago. She said that law enforcement officials in both shows were trained to notice the minutest details. If there is a robbery in “Due South” or signs of drug trafficking in “Baywatch,” the police teams are coordinated and trained to handle the situation well, she said..

The only person to offer any resistance to the images of television law enforcement was Carlos.

“You can tell a lot of times that it is too surreal because they do things, honestly, that you wouldn’t believe that they really do...In the sense that they always get to the central point and never leave a case with solving it...maybe they do have better means to arrive at solving a crime but I’ve noticed that they will solve it even in under 24 hours. And to be honest I don’t think that it could be like that. Sometimes you need serious investigations that take days or even months sometimes.”

### **Family Values, Lifestyles, and Leisure Activities**

The views of the participants on the relationship of the family unit in the U.S. were influenced by the fact that they thought that the society was much more materialistic and individualistic than Nicaraguan society. As such, they also perceived that work was

more stressful and more demanding in the U.S. than in Nicaragua, which had repercussions for the family.

Ten of the thirteen participants, when asked to identify how Americans defined success, believed that Americans placed economic interests over everything else, including family and status/prestige. Eight of those ten used the word “materialistic” when talking about Americans.

In the U.S. success means being economically well off and having prestige, Jaromir said. “And the well being of the family is something that is done secondarily. I’ve noticed that the North American society is more individualistic. Not like here. We tend to be more communal.”

He gave two examples that contributed to his perspectives. He said that he has often seen in the news that when companies have to choose between profits and personnel, they give up personnel. He also said that when watching the biographies of famous Americans he’s noticed that while the individuals are successful economically their family life is a “disaster.”

Mariela was harsher in describing the meaning of success for Americans.

“You’re worth what you have. That’s what you’re worth. In the U.S. you have to reach the pinnacle even if that means stepping on everyone else. So there is no individual or spiritual growth. In the U.S. success is having the best car, the best salary, the best position, the best house.”

Family, Mariela noted, is a lower priority to Americans because most parents have to work over 12 hours a day and spend little time with kids.

A typical American, according to Maria Jose, “leaves at 7 in the morning to go to work, eats something quickly for lunch on the street, and gets home at around 8 p.m. Of course he is very tired and dedicates the rest of his day to resting. ”

“Over there one has a different type of pressure then over here,” Yeny said. “Here everything is more laid-back, the routine isn’t so intense...and the distances aren’t that great and you have time to go back home, share lunch and dinner with your family. But not over there. The distances are really large. You have to eat outside your home.”

Evila also said that that since both husband and wife have to work from early in the morning up until very late in the night, they have little time to share time with their kids.

Rosa said that the typical American working family leaves the kids to a nanny, gets home late, and is not in the custom of asking the kids how their day went or if they needed anything.

She cited “what people have told me” as the basis of her views on the subject while Mariela, Yeny, and Evila based their conclusions on the information that had been passed on to them from relatives and from television programs. Maria Jose said that programs and movies were the basis of her conclusions.

“The nanny is in charge of the kids and that has consequences to the disunion of the family,” Maria Jose claimed. “Kids make their own life apart from that of their parents because the lack of communication means that they don’t have to tell them anything.”

Mariela said that she liked the show “My Wife and Kids,” a sitcom about a nuclear family with three kids, because it showed how a family handles their everyday problems and because they “laugh at life.”

“But I don’t like that sometimes that the dad, that sometimes they lose a level of respect between parents and kids. It’s like he uses tricks to get his kids to listen to him. So yea, it pays off but sometimes the kids can get the wrong message...I’ve seen in two or three shows that they make jokes of the women saying, ‘oh, mom,’ says the little girl, ‘my dad is ridiculous,’ ‘oh you’re dad is stupid, forgive him.’ If you’re mom, here [in Nicaragua], if your mother tells you, ‘you’re dad is stupid’ what is she letting you know? She’s making the kids lose respect for your dad. ‘oh, it’s that you’re dad is stupid, he’s mentally retarded, he’s an idiot, he’s an animal.’”

Marcelo, on the other hand, had a different reading of the family life that he sees in “My Wife and Kids.”

“There is better communication with your parents. Better communication with your friends. There aren’t as many problems...It isn’t like that here [in Nicaragua]. Here the society is more conservative in that regard. If something happens, you’re alone, alone. You keep it to yourself. You don’t share it with a friend and even less with your parents, who are the ones that should be counseling you.”

Wilberth identified some “key differences” between the U.S. and Nicaragua when he was asked about the relationships of parents and offspring in one of his favorite shows “The Simpsons,” an animated sitcom, often satirical, that follows the life of a nuclear family.

“I assure you that people in the U.S. aren’t as close to their families as Nicaraguans are. You’ll only find some four people in nursing homes here...Homer doesn’t have the patience to look after his father and so he sends him to a nursing home and shows him that he doesn’t love him at all.”

Guillermo also talked about what he saw in “The Simpsons,” but he sympathized somewhat with how hard it was to take care of an elder. He thought that the practice of putting elders in a nursing home was less common in Nicaragua than in the U.S. because it was just too expensive for most families.

Arnoldo, like Marcelo, was also impressed by the “liberty of expression” in the Simpsons's household and the relationship between Homer and his son Bart.

“What that show reflects is that relationship between a father and son. It is more direct. They are more intrusive I guess you could say. There might have better communication. Generally, here there is certain apprehension between parents and offspring. It exists because the parent dominates. There isn't much communication.”

He added that he liked the fact that Bart doesn't respect Homer because the dad is dumb and is always getting into bizarre situations. He enjoyed the “equality” between the two generations that he saw in “The Simpsons.”

Another thing he said that the show reflected was that a person could always find a job independently of not having a profession, which would be necessary to pay off his house and maintain his family.

In the show “Step by Step,” a sitcom that follows a recently married couple with 6 kids, Yeny said that she saw a rare glimpse into the workings of a nuclear family. But she was really skeptical that a family bond like the one seen in the show could exist in the U.S.

“Let me tell you something that I've noticed about the U.S,” Wilberth said. “At the age of 18, what happens? They send him to look for his own apartment, his own work, to

begin his own life at 18. Not here in Nicaragua. A son could be married and can live in his parent's house with his wife."

Maria Jose thought that "Friends," the sitcom that follows the lives of 6 single New Yorkers, was representative of how life was for young people who were independent.

"In your 20s, you leave your parent's home," she said. "You live with a friend. You rent an apartment and at the same time study. Here nobody does that. You live in your parent's house."

Noemy stated that her friends had commented to her that it was part of the American culture to start separating oneself from one's family around the age of 18.

"They prefer it that way. They always give themselves a moment of privacy, of being alone. It is very difficult here to have that. Maybe the reason for that is that they are more independent, from an early age. If you compare that with here, where at 18 or 20 you are still with your family, there is less privacy here."

Mariela expressed a certain admiration at the lives of the "Friends," but didn't like the element of promiscuity that she saw in the show.

"Rachel [a character in the show] sleeps with one today. Later on she sleeps with another. The next month, oh, here she comes with another person. And another. And another. And if it's possible with everyone in New York, with everyone in the U.S...I don't think it's really that way over there because a person has to work 12 hours and I can't imagine that person has any time left to even go out...Maybe 40% have a life like that."

Evila saw something similar in the show "Felicity," where the protagonist is a university student that dates often.

“ She seems like a woman that wants to have sex but at the same time can’t... You always see the woman as a sexual object where her dignity comes second, where her boyfriends, all the different men touch her, are always with her, and are always insinuating the same thing. And although she seems to exhibit a level of insecurity, she always sleeps with them.”

She goes on to say that she doesn’t think all the girls in the U.S. are like Felicity. She does, however, believe that the fact that the young are more independent and that parents are never around leads to them sleeping with boyfriends more in the U.S.

According to Noemy, Dawson’s Creek, a drama about the lives of high school teenagers, also shows that American society sees the subject of dating and having new boyfriends and girlfriends every week as something natural. In Nicaragua, however, that practice is very uncommon, she said.

Rosa thought that while life in the U.S. was more liberal and even “outrageous” in how they saw dating, the traditions in Nicaragua could also be obstacles.

“People here keep to they’re myths,” she said. “They believe in something and are sure of it. Since families are united, those myths persist in that you honor your dignity, your loyalty, and that you be a person who doesn’t have any blemishes that society can throw in your face.”

Wilberth expressed the difference this way: “Here if a woman wears a short skirt, she’s called a slut. Over there it’s called fashion!”

While also discussing the show “Friends,” Maria Jose highlighted other points that were common among the interviewees. She said that people in the show not only live

with whom they want but also have the freedom to date whomever they want. In Nicaragua, she said, people are more watchful of your every move.

Several of the other interviewees felt like Maria Jose in the sense that they too felt that Nicaragua was more conservative because of the emphasis that was placed on your reputation. Several expressed the adage, “Small village, Large Hell,” to explain this view.

“Over there you can dress however you want. Nobody pays you any mind,” Cora Ena noted. “You can dress like a clown, it’s your life. You don’t even know what’s going on with your neighbor or your life long friend because your working hours clash, and you don’t have time to keep up with what other people are up to...Here if you get pregnant, people say, “And she’s not married!” And if you have a drink, “look she’s an alcoholic!” And if you have male friends, “look at how many men go to her house!”

Yeny agreed with Coran Ena’s appraisal of Nicaragua, basing her conclusions on what she had seen on television and what her sister, who lives in the U.S., had told her.

“What I don’t like is that over there things are impersonal. One loses, in that sense, the human side. Over there the warmth of the family doesn’t exist. If you don’t have friends you are alone in a huge world. Here if you have a problem you knock on someone’s door. You can talk to one another and ask for help...Not over there. Over there everyone passes you by. They crash and no one looks at any one else...when they are showing the news you see in those streets [in the U.S.] how mundane life is. Everyone gets on. Everyone gets off the trains. Nobody knows each other in the trains. Here in the routes you’re like, ‘hey, how are you’ when you run into someone. That isn’t

like that over there. Over there you get on board, take care of your own business, everyone has their own life and doesn't care what happens to anyone else."

All of the participants seemed to believe that differences between the two countries in terms of the consumption of alcohol, drugs, and pornography had to do more with access to them and the economic means to purchase them. Their perceptions were mostly based on television.

"In the U.S., there is more liberty to watch pornography, to drink, to go out and have fun," Marcelo said. "Not in Nicaragua, maybe because of lack of money."

Maria Jose also said there wasn't much difference between consumption in the two countries except that people in the U.S. had more access to things like drugs and alcohol.

"In the U.S. you can find whatever you're looking for", Marcelo said. You can find whatever type of music you want. There is a variety of clubs."

His image of parties, he added, came from what he had seen in "Beverly Hills 90210," a 1990s drama that followed the lives of several high school students into their college years.

The news programs and the television medium in general, according to Carlos, led him to believe that drug use was abundant in the U.S. He said that the news programs always showed the ugly side instead of the pleasant side of things, but that was where he got information about crime and drug use in the U.S.

Mariela said that drug use was rampant in the parties held in music clubs in the U.S. She insisted that parties and clubs in Nicaragua "were more innocent" and closed earlier than in the U.S.

“There is a show here on E! Entertainment Television that is called ‘Wild On...’ And on it you see women that lift up their tops and show their breasts. You’re not going to see that here. Here you’ll see the women really covered. Never or rarely a tight skirt. And as my mom says those shows only lead you to debauchery, to debauchery, to alcohol, and drugs. And I’ve seen girls on those shows that are completely out of it. They don’t even know where they are. A lot of times there are rapes, or homicides, because the people don’t, the girls don’t even know who they slept with at night.”

She believed there were two reasons why these people indulged in this frantic lifestyle. One was the lack of communication between parents and kids. The second reason, according to Mariela was that they already had everything they could ever want in terms of possessions, which caused them to lose respect for the value of things and to lack responsibility.

Yeny also talked about “Entertainment Television” and the parties on “Wild On...” but protested the fact that Nicaraguan society was beginning to copy some of the things she saw on the channel.

“Look, everything, every idea about alcohol, sex, and drugs is copied. I absolutely think everything is copied because they think that that is having a life. That is enjoying life. That’s what they are being sold. That’s what the publicity is selling them. So they go and live that. They think that is life.”

She also added that she was astounded by the increase in drugs, sex, and alcohol in Nicaraguan society over the last 5 years, which she attributed to the mimicking of American lifestyle.

Jaromir, however, discredited what he saw on “Wild On...”<sup>2</sup> He didn’t believe that parties in the U.S. were like the ones shown in the program. He believed that the abuse of alcohol and pornography was controlled in the U.S. by such things as age limitations and other government restrictions. He did, however, believe that the U.S. was more sexually liberal than Nicaragua because students were taught sex education early on in elementary and high school, giving them information on which to base their sexual practices. The policy of the Education Ministry in Nicaragua, according to Jaromir, frowned on teaching anything related to sex.

### **Socio-Economic Status**

When the discussion turned to the differences in socio-economic status between the U.S. and Nicaragua, the participants didn’t have a clear notion of what the class system in the U.S. might look like. Once again, their opinions were influenced by the family members and immigrants that they had come in contact with, through first-person accounts in person and through television.

Maria Jose indicated that the class system was more marked in the U.S. than in Nicaragua simply because most people in Nicaragua belonged to either the middle or lower class. She said that she had seen how marginalized Hispanic immigrants were in the U.S. and that it was a marked contrast to the richer class. She didn’t, however, have an image of what that richer class in the U.S. might look like.

Arnoldo said the opposite.

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<sup>2</sup> The national channel Canal 8 is copying the format of “Wild On...” with its own show entitled “Wild En TN8.” Like it’s counterpart, the show goes to parties, interviews guests, and scans for “wild” action.

“I think the social system is way more marked in Nicaragua than in the States because here in Nicaragua there is great diversity and big differences between the upper class and the lower class.

He believed that in both countries the upper class was composed of people in government and people with “higher level careers.”

Jaromir didn’t think the class system was as marked in the U.S. as in Nicaragua. He believed that the U.S. had a distinct upper class and that everyone else was relatively well off

“ I see that a lot of people in particular situations, let’s say in the lower class, could easily ascend to the middle class if they put forth a little effort...here in Nicaragua you can see very noticeably who is in the upper class. The middle class is one that contains everyone; some who are reaching the upper class and some that are almost in the lower class. Here you have people and segments of society that don’t have anything and other who just have what they need to survive.”

Similarly, Guillermo believed there was a higher standard of living for the middle class in the U.S. than in Nicaragua, and he believed that the lower class was minimal in the U.S. when you compared them to the proportion of people in the lower class in Nicaragua.

Wilberth said that the socio-economic status of both countries were very similar.

“The people who are rich in both,” he said, “are people who are in government, while the middle class is composed of doctors, lawyers and people who own small businesses.”

Mariela believed that an established group of people belonged to the upper class in Nicaragua and that what mattered in that society was your surname. Moreover, everyone already knew who belonged to that privileged group and who didn't.

"That group always gets together and does its own thing, its own reunions and parties. 'Let's go to a certain place . . . ' So what happens? If you're poor what are you going to do? You don't have a certain surname? Then no, no, no, you don't belong with us. And they're always going to look at you like something less."

Nevertheless, she thought that class was more marked in the U.S. than in Nicaragua because of what she saw on television.

In general, the participants had little concept of what it meant to be really rich in the U.S. When they were asked to give the image they had of the upper class in the U.S., their answers resembled Guillermo's, who said: "I think the upper class have good capital, comfort, your house, your car, a life that's pretty comfortable and access to services because of money."

This description, however, was similar to how they described the comforts of the middle class.

Wilberth's image of a rich person was from the "Fresh Prince of Bel Air," while Cora Ena's was of out the show "Clueless," both sitcoms about young individuals that live with rich parents. In them, they said, people enjoy life, travel the world, have the newest cars, and even own several businesses. Evila said that the difference in socio-economic status could be seen in the type of neighborhood one lived in. She believed that the U.S. definitely had good neighborhoods and bad ones from what she had seen in "Melrose Place."

All of them agreed, however, that the state helped the individual climb up the socio-economic ladder more in the U.S. than in Nicaragua.

“U.S. citizens have certain privileges that are not given in Nicaragua,” Rosa said. “People who are from over there are given scholarships, are given enough to maintain yourself, the money for basic nutrition. All that help that you have we don’t have here.”

Guillermo identified the “American Dream” as going from the middle class to the upper class in order that “your life has the comforts that you’ve always dreamt of. I think that’s what it is, to set a goal and work towards it.”

The U.S. government, he added, facilitated this by granting scholarships and the opportunities at all levels of education. This was something that was minimally done in Nicaragua, he noted. He based his answers on the subject on the news he had both seen on television and read in newspapers.

Not everyone has access to education, Carlos said, because of the lack of economic resources in Nicaragua. Often, he added, kids have to work in order to help their families and miss out on gaining a university education.

Cora Ena said that the information she’s gotten from her father, the news, and shows like “Cristina” (a talk show on Univision) have led her to believe that the state helps individuals more in the U.S. than in Nicaragua.

“The state gives you a percentage back when you have kids,” she said. “They help when you don’t have a job. Dining tables are set up for people who don’t have jobs. And for elders too.”

When they were asked about the role that gender, race, and ethnicity had on the on a person's position in the class system, not a single respondent talked about any

discrimination towards women. The answers focused mostly on race and ethnicity in terms of African-Americans and Hispanic immigrants.

Discrimination, according to Yeny, exists in both places. She believed, however, that the discrimination in the U.S. was based on race and ethnicity while in Nicaragua the discrimination depended on your economic status.

An Arab with money is still discriminated in the U.S., she said, while in Nicaragua a white girl with no money is discriminated.

She based her conclusions on what she had seen in movies and in a show in Discovery Channel where she had seen how certain children in the U.S. are very self conscious and made to feel inferior because of their race.

“There is a great deal of discrimination,” Maria Jose said, “that isn’t seen here. In some cases it’s almost a quotidian thing for an African American or Hispanic to be discriminated. There are some African Americans who have been able to do well, live well in the U.S., but the majority is marginalized.”

“If we talk about Hispanics,” Wilberth said, “they look at you as if you’re inferior because they know there is money in their country, and that if you’re over there in their country to work it is out of necessity. And so some take advantage of your need because they humiliate you, denigrate you, the worst things.”

Cora Ena said that she’s watched in TV series that Blacks are discriminated against and that they are usually the suspects whenever there is a crime. She also noted that employers look at the physical characteristics of a person to determine how a potential job candidate will act.

Jaromir claimed that he had seen on news shows that racism against African-Americans still existed in the U.S. Later on, however, he said that the image that he had of African Americans was based more on what he had seen in on television shows and movies.

“I really think that, for example, that most of the time if they show problems with drugs, problems with theft, with homicides in a series, they usually show the viewer that it someone that is African-American. The violent series also usually show that the white guy is the good guy. The African-American is the bad guy.”

In general, the participants recognized that African-Americans were discriminated and stereotyped in both television and movies. At the same time they believed that African Americans had a distinct lifestyle that often included crime.

Evila, for instance, said:

“From movies and what one sees in American history, well, they are people that have always been disenfranchised because they have been used, for hard labor, heavy work. It’s possible that that entire community has an element of resentment...Maybe that’s why it’s possible that they are more aggressive...It is like they are always on the defensive because of what they have experienced in the past.”

Yeny said she liked some African-Americans who had “fought to integrate into society,” but most Africans lived a lifestyle that was more “worry free.”

“I see that maybe television and all that stuff influences a lot. Blacks on drugs, Blacks fighting within their own race, Black homicides. Blacks who are never vindicated and aren’t in the university. As a group, the majority doesn’t fight to excel.”

Indicative of the contradictory feelings that the participants had about African Americans was Mariela's testimony. She acknowledged that African-Americans had historically been marginalized, mistreated, and generally disliked. This competed with the fact that her dad had been robbed at gunpoint by an African American who he believed might be involved with a gang. This violent image of African-Americans was reinforced by television.

"I have seen it in programs, like I said, like in 'Boston Public,' movies, and stuff...I have seen cases where there are neighborhoods where all the individuals of black features carry weapons, weapons, everything, everything. They carry drugs. You can find that with white people but it's understood that in a black neighborhood you can find weapons, drugs, everything. You see everything...You see that in 'Training Day' with Denzel Washington. Sometimes in Discovery Channel there is a show called Medical Detectives where there were shots in a black neighborhood and you see all the black people in that neighborhood. The normal thing is too see a car and [makes gun shot noise] a bullet fight. And that gives you an idea."

Similarly, Arnold said that television and movies, as well as friends he talked to, led him to believe that African Americans were good at dirty businesses and transactions like the drug trade.

"They always have a lot of money because of those things. And they're always well dressed, elegant, but at the same time they are indifferent to society because the other society is of a more serious nature. And they seem to take things more carefree...there is always going to be drugs and there are also going to be dead people, homicides, and assaults. And whenever you see a program it is related to this."

The participants seemed to agree that African Americans were generally very different than their white counterparts. Carlos, for instance, said that “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” a sitcom about a rich African American family, showed him “ a person that was more joyful, more dedicated to family even. More dedicated in the sense that he doesn’t commit himself 100% to work and instead gives himself the liberty to spend with family and have fun.”

In shows like “The District” and “NYPD Blue,” both crime dramas set in Washington and N.Y. respectively, he saw that white people were more committed to working and generally leave their families as something secondary.

Cora Ena said that “Moesha,” a sitcom that follows the life of an African American teenager, showed her several distinct characteristics about African Americans.

“There is a great difference in the music. She [Moesha] listens to a lot of rap. They use a lot of the clothes that males use and are really loose-fitting. How they talk to each other isn’t the same. It’s different than ‘Clueless,’ which is another program. They are different because the clothes are different, they are more of class, aren’t as loose-fitting. The girls don’t use a lot of colors. In Moesha they use a lot of patterns and things that are very flashy. They have thick braids and use a lot of make up.”

Wilberth agreed with Cora’s assessment of African Americans. He also stated that they use extravagant clothes, had wild hairstyles, and thick jewelry.

Yeny said she disliked the “Fresh Prince of Bel Air” because the characters in the show said the jokes didn’t make much sense and bordered on the illogical. She thought the difference in culture was why she did not like the show.

## CHAPTER 5 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

### **Summary**

The aim of the study was to identify how Nicaraguan citizens perceived the lifestyles of American citizens and to analyze how particular messages from U.S. television programs were influencing those perceptions. The in-depth interviews revealed that the participants used television in two distinct forms. In one case, television messages were reinforcing the ideas that the students had heard about the U.S. from friends and families. One of the significant findings of the research is that all the participants, even those who had been selected to participate in the study because they had no or little exposure to the perspectives of people who had traveled to the U.S., cited travelers to the U.S. as references to back up their conclusion. Marcelo, 23, for instance, claimed that he knew no one that had traveled to the U.S. Throughout the interview, however, he cited the information that had been given to him by people who had been to the U.S. Similarly, the other participants also regularly cited information obtained from other travelers to support their own opinions. For the most part, this was true of the questions regarding jobs and, to a lesser extent, the class structure of the United States. In the second case, the participants were apt to rely on the messages that they perceived from television, both in its fictional and non-fictional form, to form certain conclusions about U.S. lifestyles. For the most part, television was a major influence when it came to questions dealing with family lifestyles and violence/law enforcement.

It is safe to say that the key factor that determined how much influence television exerted over the participants was the strength and complexity of the preconceived notions, or schemata, by which they organized information about the United States. While schemata are not static networks used only to filter information they mostly are resistant to disconfirmation. As Graber (1988) notes, the schemata that are learned and hardened during our early years tend to remain unchanged throughout a lifetime and “the odds favor schema maintenance over schema growth or creation” (pp. 185-187). In other words, individuals are more likely to process information in a way that confirms their existing schema and to avoid that information that contradicts them.

The main schemata that influenced the perceptions of the participants in the study in regards to job opportunities came from the perceived experiences of Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. and from the significant differences in economic opportunities between the two countries. The interpersonal communication variable was most influential in the area of job opportunities. Several of the participants, like Cora Ena and Jaromir for example, had relatives in the U.S. who have struggled economically in the U.S. Others had tapped into an extensive network of information relating to the life of an immigrant in the U.S. Still others, like Marcelo, who said he did not know any one who had traveled to the U.S. repeatedly used information from “people who have traveled” as the basis of his conclusions

In general, the participants believed that job opportunities in the U.S. were much better in the U.S. than in Nicaragua and that the standard of living was also higher in the U.S. independently of whether one was a professional or held a menial job. They had no real notion of the division of labor in the U.S. but tended to believe that a large majority

of people in the U.S. worked as professionals. This fact, according to the participants, was a markedly different from the reality of the unemployment and underemployment figures for both professionals and non-professionals in Nicaragua.

The television programs that most had an impact on the participants, and which reinforced the perspectives given to them by first-person accounts, were news programming and news magazines-style shows, particularly those shows on the Spanish-language network Univision. While most Nicaraguans do not have cable, the national channels regularly show CNN International and Univision shows like “Primer Impacto” and “Cristina,” which have definite messages about employment and the American economy that influenced the participants.

Interestingly enough, while not many occupations were mentioned specifically during the interviews, the participants did elaborate on the most common occupations found on television, namely those that involved doctors, lawyers, and law enforcement officials. Medical shows like “ER” and “Precinct Med,” attorney-themed programs like “Ally McBeal,” and “The Practice, as well as the crime drama shows, contributed to their opinions about these specific occupations. The participants were able to talk at length about these programs and the occupations they saw on the screen. Moreover, the fact that many of the participants had careers in similar fields seem to augment their interest in the show and accentuate how they processed the information on the screen.

An interesting point that supports the theory that information is processed which reinforces schemata and ignored if it might clash with that same schemata is the fact that the participants believed that all Americans lived an agitated and stressful lifestyle that was much different from Nicaragua. This belief in an agitated and stressful lifestyle was

usually tied, during the interviews, to the belief in an immigrant narrative that assumed that most Hispanics in the U.S. had to work non-stop just to survive economically. But when probed further the participants usually said that they thought all Americans worked long, tedious hours and lived taxing and hectic lifestyles. In general, research (Signorelli and Kahleberg, 2001; Butsch, 1992) shows that working families or blue-collar workers, for instance, are rarely represented on television and it is safe to assume that they are rarely if ever shown to be working in agitated and stressful conditions. In other words, fictional television programming for the most part shows a lifestyle that is more calm and relaxed. The assumption that can be made then is that the participants did not cite fictional programming to back up the schema that “life is hectic for all Americans” because it would have been contradictory to their belief structure. But the participants did cite television when talking about the affluence that Americans enjoy which would affirm their schema.

Like the conclusions in the category of work opportunities, the participants based many of their opinions about socio-economic status in the U.S. on the experiences of immigrants and those who had traveled to the U.S. In general, however, they did not have a clear notion of the class system in the U.S. Overall, their perspectives on class were very influenced by the stark class system in Nicaragua. To them, the most dramatic reality in Nicaragua was the large number of people that belonged to the lower class and lived in poverty. They went on a certain faith that “class differences” existed everywhere but were largely devoid of significant images of class in the U.S. except for the ones relating to immigrants. They didn’t mention poor whites or poor blacks, for instance. When probed they expressed a belief that minorities like Hispanics and

African-Americans were nearer the bottom of that class scale in the U.S. but believed that effort and education helped the individual, independently of gender, ethnicity, or race, to climb the social ladder. According to the participants the U.S. government and the “welfare state” also helps the individual more than in Nicaragua. Again, their understanding of issues such as education and government assistance was influenced by their perception of the poverty and economic tribulations that overwhelm Nicaragua.

Once again, television news and Univision were the key programs playing a role in how the participants saw the U.S. society, though it was more likely to reinforce what they had obtained from first person contacts. Significantly, the participants did not seem to be able to articulate a significant image of a “rich person” in the United States. The schemata that they had of an “rich person” in the U.S was a person who lives comfortably and has enough to take care of his family, a description that could easily have been the description of a middle class family. Not one of the participants mentioned the life of executives of a U.S. corporation, for instance, which often are featured on news programs. As stated earlier, sitcoms and dramas do not commonly portray rich families or the luxury that accompany that socio-economic status. A couple of the participants did mention the characters from “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” “Clueless,” and the Mr. Burns character in “The Simpsons,” as characters that were rich, but they did not have a round or solid description of how these characters reflected U.S. society.

Television programming such as sitcoms and dramas was more influential in the categories of family and violence/law enforcement. The schemata that the participants used to evaluate “family” in the U.S. was related to two things; one, was the belief in the agitated lifestyle of the U.S. and the long working hours, while the second dealt with the

fact that the participants also believed that U.S. society was more materialistic than Nicaraguan society. Both of these factors, according to the participants, influenced family life in the U.S. They said that parents were motivated by their materialistic nature to work long hours, which kept them away from home and the kids. Family seemed to be a secondary priority to adults. This “neglect,” in turn, led to U.S. children becoming independent at earlier ages than in Nicaragua, where it was customary to live at home until one was married. It is hard to locate the exact origin of these interrelated schemata. The participants seemed to believe, but never really articulated, that the economic opportunities of the U.S. seem to cleave the family units as each member actively seeks and is able to find financial independence, an independence that is not entirely possible in Nicaragua. It may also be related to a need in Nicaraguan society to maintain the family unit as well as other social groups intact in order to survive in the historically poor country. The geographical distance between cities in the U.S. was another factor that influences the “emotional distance” between families, a factor that is not as manifest in geographically smaller Nicaragua.

Television shows like “Friends,” “Dawson’s Creek,” and “Felicity,” exemplified the separate sphere in which young people seemed to live. It is a world, according to the participants where there is more dependence on friends instead of family and where the individual has more privacy. Another thing that the participants saw in television programming was a general lack of respect by children for their parents in such shows like “The Simpsons” and “My Wife and Kids.” They believed that this was representative of the U.S. Ironically, some of the participants believed that the parity and friendliness that the other participants criticized in the relationship between parents and

offspring, led to more open relationships and better communication between parents and children in the U.S. than in Nicaragua. Both interpretations of the television texts may fit in with Douglas (2003) extensive research on how the family is presented in television. He says that while families in television are usually mutually respectful, “disagreements and disputes are a standard feature of television family life” (p. 125). The disputes are usually amicably resolved through communication tactics such as commanding, hinting, requesting, and/or reasoning (p. 123). While the participants may have picked up on this on-going conflict, their schemata about the nuclear family was not altered by the fact that most families presented on television programming are functioning nuclear families.

Another curious interpretation of texts like “Friends” and “Beverly Hills” was how the participants perceived the dating and sexual practices of the young adult protagonists in these shows. Unlike in Nicaragua, they said, the young adults in these shows seemed to date often and engage in casual sex. Since these young adults were independent, in as much as no authoritative figure was controlling their actions, they were able to move freely in the dating world. This is not possible in Nicaragua according to the participants. Several of the interviewees hinted that the smallness of the towns in general, and the fact that everyone knew each other and related “gossip” to authority figures, made it near impossible to act in a similar fashion to the young adults in the U.S. Another factor that certainly influenced the way the participants thought about dating and sex was the role that religion plays in Nicaraguan society. Abstinence is acutely promoted not only by the church, which is a powerful institution in Nicaragua, but by the Ministry of Education and the schooling system. A couple of the participants did believe,

however, that the promiscuity in Nicaragua was also increasing due to the “American values” that were entering Nicaraguan society.

As would be expected, television programming had the most effect on how the participants perceived crime/law enforcement in the United States. As Gerbner (2002) says, television viewers are subject to a mean and violent world on television full of robberies, homicides, and rapes. Furthermore, Cultivation research has found that heavy television viewers have a more violent perception of the world than do light television watchers because of the amount of crime dramas full of homicides, armed assault, and rapes found on television. In this study, Nicaraguan citizens based much of their opinions about violence and law enforcement on what they saw on shows like “NYPD Blue,” “CSI” and even “Baywatch.” The documentaries they saw on Discovery channel, considered more real than the fictional dramas, influenced how the interviewees understood crime in the U.S. Though the participants believed that crime was pretty equal in both countries, they thought that the crimes in the U.S. were much more violent than the ones committed in Nicaragua. This violence, however, was offset by the well-trained police force and high-tech resources found in the U.S, according to the participants, which they saw at work in the aforementioned television shows. In contrast, Nicaraguan police well ill-trained, poorly paid, and lacked the support of high-tech resources to fight crime, they said.

The underdeveloped television sector in Nicaragua made it a wonderful place to try to investigate the praxis of audience and text because the country is dependent on foreign programming to feed its broadcast stations. Hall’s (1980) Encoding/Decoding model suggests that media texts have messages that resonate with audiences because these

audiences recognize the social and cultural characteristics in these messages as their own. In this cross-cultural study, the aim was to identify how a Nicaraguan audience alters the meanings of U.S. television texts along their own macro-social and personal characteristics.

In summary, this study found that the individuals in the study selectively interpreted certain messages on U.S. television programs to reinforce the beliefs that they had about the U.S. Television programs dealing crime and law enforcements were key means by which the Nicaraguan individuals learned about that aspect of American society. The participants believed that while the U.S. certainly had more violent crimes than Nicaragua, the available resources that law enforcement in the U.S. enjoyed, both in manpower and technology, was considerably different from Nicaragua. Programs showing the lives of young adults and singles were more influential in how the participants conceived of “family life” than shows about nuclear families. The reason for this had to do with the participants’ belief that Americans are more individualistic than Nicaraguans and consequently preserving the family nucleus was not a priority for most Americans.

Television’s role in the participants’ understanding of job opportunities and socio-economic status was slightly different than the other categories. For the most part, the participants relied on non-fictional shows like news programs and news magazines that featured stories dealing with Hispanic immigrants in the U.S. to amplify the narrative that they had heard through interpersonal communication about these same immigrants. In the case of job opportunities, the participants believed that while most Americans had good professional jobs, were paid well, and had the opportunities to achieve success

through effort and education, they were more likely to talk about the hardships that immigrants faced in the U.S. While they had no clear notion of the class system in the U.S., the participants again expressed confidence in the ability for U.S. residents to move upwards in socio-economic status, which was starkly different to the bleak outlook the participants had on the economic opportunities that individuals have in Nicaragua.

### **Study Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research**

This investigation was limited by the fact that the underdevelopment of Nicaragua as a whole may be so marked that it is difficult to ascertain the many variables that may be influencing the reading of the television texts. In other words, it may have been too easy to attribute the opinions of the participants to the poverty and low employment opportunities of the country disregarding the influence of the social standing of the participants themselves.

This investigation ambitiously set out to identify the differences in two very different worlds across several categories which, in the end, may have taken away from identifying the complexity of each category in and of itself. Future research would be wise to select just a single category of opinions (i.e. family values) to investigate and seek to identify a larger volume of sources for each one.

Similarly, the focus on different categories may have taken away from concentrating on the personal information and lifestyle of the participants themselves. Such as focus would have allowed the investigator to better understand the exact characteristics that the individuals used to interpret the television texts.

Another limitation of this study is that it did not study the linguistic differences evident in the dubbing and subtitles of the U.S. programs. “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” to

use an example, is considerably different in Spanish and English because much of the show's uniqueness is found in the protagonist's manner of speech (i.e. slang). The difference between the true script and the subtle changes that creep into the text once a translation is required could potentially throw off the way that program is interpreted. Further research attempting to address the perceptions of the U.S. abroad must take the linguistic differences into account.

The participants openly cited the medical and detective programs on the "Discovery Channels" as the basis for many of their conclusions. A gap in the literature exists on how channels like the "The Discovery Channel and other non-fictional channels like "The Learning Channel" and "The History Channel" influence perceptions about society in general. A future study might ask whether documentary type programs on these channels are more likely to be perceived as more realistic than fictional sitcoms and dramas, and whether such a perception holds across national borders.

Finally, it would be useful to know more about other forms of television and media content, both fictional and non-fictional, that influences the worldviews of audiences in Nicaragua. A baseline study of media in Nicaragua is in order.

APPENDIX A  
TELEVICENTRO CHANNEL 2 PROGRAMMING LINEUP  
MONDAYS JULY 2003

LUNES MARTES MIÉRCOLES JUEVES VIERNES SÁBADO DOMINGO		
HORA	PROGRAMA	GÉNERO
6:00	Noticiero CNN	Noticias
6:30	TV NOTICIAS: PRIMERA HORA	Noticias
7:00		
7:30	Cristina	Talk Show
8:00		
8:30	Caliente	Variedad
9:00		
9:30	Ramona	Telenovela
10:00		
10:30	La Otra	Telenovela
11:00		
11:30	TV NOTICIAS: AL MEDIODÍA	Noticias
12:00		
12:30	Un Ángel Cayó del Cielo	Telenovela
1:00		
1:30	Los Picapiedras	Dibujos
2:00		
2:20	Pókemon	Dibujos
2:40		
2:40	Robotech	Dibujos
3:00		
3:00	Gundam Wine	Dibujos
3:20		
3:20	Cómplices al Rescate	Novela
3:40		
4:00	El Juego de la Vida	Novela
4:30		
5:00	Isabel me la veló	Novela
5:30		
6:00	Noticiero Univisión	Novela
6:30		
6:30	TV NOTICIAS: EDICIÓN ESTELAR	Noticias
7:00		
7:00	Salomé	Novela
7:30		
8:00	Pedro el Escamoso	Novela
8:30		
9:00	EL CLON	Novela
9:30		
10:00	TV NOTICIAS: EDICIÓN NOCTURNA	Noticias
10:30		
10:30	La Agencia	Serie
11:00		
11:30	Ally Mcbeal	Serie
12:00		

Figure A-1. Televiscentro Channel 2 Programming Lineup  
Source: Televiscentro Canal 2  
(<http://www.canal2tv.com/programas/horarios.html>)

APPENDIX B  
ESTESA CABLE SERVICE CHANNEL LINEUP IN LEON (MARCH 2005)

CANAL	TELEVISORA	DESCRIPCIÓN
2	CANAL 2	LOCAL
3	NICKELODEON	CANAL PARA NIÑOS
4	CANAL 4	LOCAL
5	FOX KIDS	CANAL PARA NIÑOS
6	MOVIE WORLD	PELICULAS
7	BOOMERANG	DIBUJOS ANIMADOS - ESPAÑOL (SAP / STEREO)
8	TELENICA	LOCAL
9	CARTOON NETWORK	DIBUJOS ANIMADOS - ESPAÑOL (SAP / STEREO)
10	CANAL 10	LOCAL
11	ESTV	LOCAL - VARIADO
12	NICAVISION	LOCAL
13	DISNEY CHANNEL	CANAL FAMILIAR
14	CINECANAL OESTE	PELICULAS
15	HALLMARK	PELICULAS
16	ESPN 2.	DEPORTES
17	FOX SPORTS	DEPORTES VARIADOS 24 HORAS - ESPAÑOL
18	E.S.P.N. INTERNACIONAL	DEPORTES GENERALES - ESPAÑOL (SAP / STEREO)
19	CINEMAX OLE	PELICULAS (STEREO)
20	SONY	SERIES (STEREO)
21	H. B. O. OLE	PELICULAS (STEREO)
22	WARNER CHANNEL	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA
23	MULTIPREMIERE	PELICULAS
24	U. S. A.	CANAL FAMILIAR
25	STARZ	PELICULAS
26	TNT	VARIADO - ESPAÑOL (SAP / STEREO)
27	CANAL DE LAS ESTRELLAS	VARIADO - ESPAÑOL
28	TV AZTECA 13	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA EN ESPAÑOL
29	TELEMUNDO	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA/NOTICIOSA EN ESPAÑOL
30	TELENOVELAS	NOVELAS MEXICANAS
31	ANIMAL PLANET	MUNDO ANIMAL - ESPAÑOL

32	PEOPLE & ARTS	CULTURA MUNDIAL - ESPAÑOL (SAP / STEREO)
33	DISCOVERY CHANNEL	EDUCATIVO PARA TODA LA FAMILIA (SAP)
34	A. X. N.	SERIES - VARIADO - ESPAÑOL
35	FOX LATINO	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA
36	CNN EN ESPAÑOL	NOTICIAS ESPAÑOL
37	HISTORY CHANNEL	DOCUMENTALES HISTORICOS
38	MUNDO OLÉ	DOCUMENTALES
39	EI ENTERTAINMENT	ENTRETENIMIENTO
40	M. G. M.	PELICULAS
41	NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC	EDUCATIVO PARA TODA LA FAMILIA (SAP / STERE)
42	TELEHIT	PROGRAMACION MUSICAL
43	RITMO SON	PROGRAMACIÓN MUSICAL
44	TV GUIDE	GUIA DE PROGRAMACION
45	EWTN	RELIGIOSO - ESPAÑOL
46	T. B. S.	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA - INGLÉS
47	CARACOL	VARIADO
48	KTLA	VARIADO BASEBALL
49	A. B. C.	NOTICIAS - PELICULAS - INGLES
50	N. B. C.	NOTICIAS - PELICULAS - INGLES
51	C. B. S.	NOTICIAS - PELICULAS - INGLES
52	DISCOVERY KIDS	CANAL PARA NIÑOS (SAP / STEREO)
53	FILM & ARTS	PELÍCULAS, DOCUMENTALES
54	DE PELICULA	PELICULAS MEXICANAS
55	CINE LATINO	PELICULAS - ESPAÑOL
56	M.T.V. LATINO	MUSICA JUVENIL - ESPAÑOL (STEREO)
57	FILM ZONE	PELICULAS
58	CNN - INTERNACIONAL	NOTICIAS - INGLÉS
59	DISCOVERY TRAVEL & ADVENTURE	VIAJES Y AVENTURAS ALREDEDOR DEL MUNDO
60	FOX MIAMI	PROGRAMACIÓN VARIADA EN INGLÉS
61	CINE CANAL ESTE	PELICULAS
62	FILM ZONE ESTE	PELICULAS
63	100% NOTICIAS	NOTICIAS - LOCAL
64	DISCOVERY HEALTH	CANAL FAMILIAR - ESPAÑOL (SAP)
65	T.V.E.	CANAL FAMILIAR - ESPAÑOL
66	R.A.I.	VARIADO - ITALIANO
67	BBC LONDRES	VARIADO - INGLES
68	DEUTCHE WELLE	VARIADO - ALEMAN
69	TV5 FRANCIA	VARIADO - FRANCÉS
75	CASA CLUB TV	VARIADO FAMILIAR
76	FOOD NETWORK	VARIADO
78	MAGIC CHANNEL	MUSICAL - LOCAL
96	ENLACE	EVANGELICO - LOCAL
99	CANAL 23	LOCAL
		Revisado 1 de dicierr

Figure B-1. Estesa Cable Service Channel Lineup In Leon

Source: Estesa Cable Services (([http://www.estesa.com.ni/guia\\_canales/cable.html](http://www.estesa.com.ni/guia_canales/cable.html)))

APPENDIX C  
BACKGROUND INFORMATION ON THE 13 PARTICIPANTS

**Interview 1: Yeny Contreras**

Yeny Contreras, 21, was born in Esteli, a city in the Northwestern part of the country. Her parents and siblings were born in El Salvador and emigrated to the U.S. when Yeny was very young. Both of her parents are merchants and her dad travels around the U.S. selling different items. They both had only elementary education

She is in her 5<sup>th</sup> year of law and does not have a job. She stated that she watched about 12 –13 hours in a week, most of those hours coming in the weekend. She has cable and enjoys watching MTV and other shows that play American music. She also stated that she used to watch a lot of series but stopped liking them.

Yeny repeatedly stressed that she liked programs that showed the humanity of everyday living. Also was very opinionated on the importance of family and lack of that familial support in the U.S.

The shows she talked about were “Beverly Hills 90210”, which she “watched forever”, “Friends,” and “ER”. She also watched a little “Ally McBeal” but stopped liking it cause it “got silly” and “went away from what she liked.” Also mentioned “Step by Step.” The shows she didn’t like were Buffy and Fresh Prince.

**Interview 2: Jaromir Pastora**

Jaromir, 23, was also born in Esteli but is living in Leon because he is studying medicine at la UNAN (Universidad Nacional Autonoma Nicaraguense). He is in his 6<sup>th</sup> and final year of medical school. He is married and has a kid.

His dad has bachelors in public accounting and manages a shop in his home. His mom is a housewife who completed her first year of high school.

Jaromir has sisters residing in U.S. and also knew other friends and family members that have traveled to U.S. Though one of his sisters has a Bachelor in law from Nicaragua and the two others have a degree in business administration, Jaromir stated that they are all involved in labor that involves housework, taking care of children, and cleaning. He stated that he also had talked to Americans living in Nicaragua who shared with him what American lifestyle was like.

He watches some 15-20 hours a week, but there are times when he watches too much television when he has to tear himself from it. Has cable

Jaromir claimed to love any type of sports programming. In regards to series and dramas, he mentioned “Dharma and Greg,” “Friends,” “ER,” “Med Precinct,” and “Discovery Health.” He liked medical shows because they showed him different type of treatments and new technology. He also likes to watch movies but made it clear that he likes movies that are surprising and not trite.

He said he really disliked “Jackass” because he felt that not only were the individuals in that show selling their dignity for money but also because it showed that U.S. society is materialistic. He also doesn’t like JLO because he feels she’s separated herself from her Latina roots to take on Anglo Saxon parts and Eminem, the rapper, because Jaromir thinks he makes U.S. society look violent and chaotic. He said that while it may be violent and chaotic in some parts it isn’t that way in the whole U.S.

Jaromir also believes television does affect violence in real life. He said that television gives people get ideas. He stated that movies gave people the idea to crash airplanes into buildings on 9/11 and also alluded to shootings in school (like Columbine).

### **Interview 3: Mariela Aguirre**

Mariela Aguirre, 21, was born in Leon. She is in the 5<sup>th</sup> year of law school. Her mom is a pharmacist and her dad is a doctor. Both of them have university degrees.

She says that she has uncles, cousins, and friends who live in the U.S. Her dad has also traveled to the U.S. and has shared his perspective on what the U.S. is like. She has cable.

She watches about 3 or 4 hours a day of television, about 24 on average. She has cable.

Mariela said that she really likes American movies and shows like “CSI,” “Law and Order,” and “The Practice.” She stated that she liked shows that have the theme of family and unity, and was very opinionated on this subject during the interview. She also watched “My Wife and Kids,” “Everybody Loves Raymond,” and “Friends,” as well as news shows such as “60 Minutes” and “ABC news.” She also listed the channels to which she tunes in regularly: Discovery Channel, A&E Mundo, People and Arts, Discovery Health, Animal Planet, and the Warner Channel.

She also said that one thing she didn’t like about the U.S. was that they glorified themselves in movies and made themselves to be the heroes in movies. She also didn’t like what she perceived to be a disrespect and mistreatment of parents by American kids.

#### **Interview 4: Noemy Campos**

Noemy Campos, 22, was born in Rivas, Nicaragua. She resides in Managua during the weekdays because she is studying psychology in a university located there. During the weekends she usually heads home to Niquinohomo, a small town near Masaya.

She is the daughter of a single mom, who works in the domestic area as a cook and maid. Her mom only had elementary schooling.

Noemy said she had various friends who had been to the U.S. and others who had moved to the country permanently.

She has cable in her house in Managua but only national channels in her home in Niquinohomo. She says she only watches about 7 hours of television a week but when she was younger she watched 7 hours a day. She likes to watch news programming, specifically the international news on Univision. She said she admires and looks up to the professionalism of Jorge Ramos and MariaElena, the two lead anchors on Univision's network news. She also likes to watch shows like "Friends," "Dawson's Creek," "ER."

Along with Rosa, Noemy was the most reticent of all the interviewees. It was thus surprising to hear her say, in response to the question of how Americans define success, that Americans want to rule over the world. She talked briefly about the Free Trade Agreements, but not in detail, but believed that the U.S. was taking advantage of the poorer country of Nicaragua. She believed that news programs were more apt than fictional programs to distort reality.

#### **Interview 5: Carlos Muñoz**

Carlos Muñoz, 21, was born in Leon. He is a 5<sup>th</sup> year medical student. His parents are separated. His mom is a high school professor and he does not have contact with his father. His mom has a biology degree.

He does not have family or friends that live in the United States and does not know anyone that has traveled to the United States.

Carlos watches about 12-15 hours a week of television and only receives the national channels at home. He likes comedies and action movies. Among the shows he mentioned were "Aprendiendo a Vivir," (a Spanish soap) "Dawson's Creek," "Buffy," "Fresh Prince of Bel Air," as well as "The District," "NYPD Blue," "Angel," and "Relic Hunter."

He also expressed a belief that the violence may be harmful to kids because they often try to copy what they see on television. He also thought that television might be influencing an individual's desire for power because it often shows powerful individuals

acting selfishly without showing the true nature of the suffering these individuals cause. Furthermore, he believed that U.S. television was transmitting cultural values that were foreign to Nicaragua and thought that Nicaragua needed shows that would showcase its own culture.

### **Interview 6: Arnaldo Cuevas**

Arnaldo Cuevas, 22, was born in Leon. He is in his fifth year of odontology and does not have a job. His dad is a mechanic who owns his own shop. His mom is a housewife. His dad received some high school education but did not finish while his mom attended elementary schooling.

He said that he has cousins and friends that have traveled to the U.S. who have shared how difficult life is in the U.S. because one has to work long hours and lives a stressful life.

Arnaldo said he watches about 14-15 hours of television a week. Used to watch about 5 hours a day when he was in high school. The shows he enjoys include "Friends," "My Wife and Kids," "Fresh Prince of Bel Air," and "The Simpsons." He said that most of the series that he watches are on the Warner Channel. He also tunes in frequently to the Discovery Channel.

One thing that he noticed was different in the U.S. was that there was a freedom of communication between friends and parents. He didn't feel that that existed so much in Nicaragua. He was also impressed by the access to services such as health care that Americans enjoyed. In comparison, he said, Nicaraguans have no one to really help him or her out.

### **Interview 7: Evila Quintana**

Evila Quintana, 21, was born in Leon. She is married and has a daughter. She is almost finished with medical school. Her mother is an odontologist while her dad is an administrator. Both of her parents have a university degree.

Her dad lives in the U.S. and has a newspaper there. Evila has traveled to other Central American countries and said that she would rather live in another Central American country than in the U.S. Dad mostly tells her about how heavy work is in the U.S.

She watches about 14-15 hours a week and has cable. She routinely wakes up and puts on CNN in the morning. She also said that she used to watch a lot of television when she was in high school.

The shows she watches the most were on Discovery Health and the Sony channel. Most of the shows that she watched dealt with medical issues. Among the ones she

mentioned were “E.R.,” “Medical Detectives,” “Dawson’s Creek,” “Friends,” “Dharma and Greg,” and “Felicity.”

She expressed a real faith in the “realness” of the shows on the Discovery Channel and the History Channel. She thought that more “reality” shows like those should be presented on the national channels so that Nicaraguans would see reality and no longer think that everything in the U.S. was so great.

### **Interview 8: Maria Jose Vargas**

Maria Jose Vargas, 21, was born in Leon Nicaragua. She is finishing her studies as a clinical analyst. Her dad works as a civil servant while her mother is an administrator at a market. Both her parents have university degrees.

She said she has friends that have traveled to the U.S. that have said that life is more agitated in the U.S. and that the youth are also more liberal because there are more modes of entertainment. They also have told her that life is dangerous. Watches about 10 hours of TV a day.

She watches about 10 hours of television a day but watches Discovery Health often. She also watches the “X Files,” “Friends,” “The Simpsons,” and “Dawson’s Creek.”

Maria Jose spoke adamantly about her belief that Americans were more materialistic and individualistic than Nicaraguans. She said that television influenced that perception of American life. Furthermore, she believed that some of the ills of society such as drug addiction were a result of the family’s lack of unity.

### **Interview 9: Marcelo Amaya**

Marcelo Amaya, 23, was born in Leon, Nicaragua. He is studying International Relations and wants to work with community development in Nicaragua. His dad is an electrician and his mom is a seamstress. His dad studied until the third year of high school while his mom received schooling until middle school.

He said that he did not know anybody that lives in the U.S. Has no contact with anyone. In the interview, however, he cited what he had heard from other people about the U.S. to back his conclusions.

Marcelo watches about 20 hours a week and has cable. He expressed a real interest in international news and tried to keep more informed of international news than of national news. He said he tuned in often to CNN International. He also likes to watch television that is educational like the Discovery Channel and the People and Arts Channels. Other shows he watched included “Friends,” the “Simpsons,” “Ally McBeal,”

and “Dawson’s Creek.” Marcelo believed that there should be less violence on television because children were susceptible to watching and imitating that violence.

He felt that civil society in the U.S. was more organized than in Nicaragua. He also believed that the individual’s rights were more protected in the U.S. than in Nicaragua. He based this view on what he had seen on the national news. He also talked about the privileges that money affords you in both countries and specifically cited the legal troubles that Mike Tyson had faced over the years in the U.S.

### **Interview 10: Cora Ena Monterey**

Cora Ena Monterey, 21, was born in Masaya. She is in her 2<sup>nd</sup> year of physiotherapy at a university in Managua. Her dad works at a restaurant in the U.S. while her mom is a housewife. She no longer talks to him.

She cited the information that her dad had communicated as the basis of many of her opinions about the U.S. He entered the U.S. illegally and experienced some real hardships upon arriving. Cora Ena said he was homeless for a while as he worked all sort of odd jobs. He told her that while there is money to be made in the States one doesn’t really get to enjoy it because one has to work all the time.

Cora Ena said that she really enjoyed watching television. She watches about 20-25 hours of television a week, but that balloons to around 40 hours when she has more free time. She only has the over-the-air channels in her home. Among the shows she likes were the “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” “Moesha,” “Clueless,” “Xena: Princess Warrior,” “Dawson’s Creek,” “That 70s Show,” “Baywatch,” the “X Files” and Disney shows like “Pepper Ann” and “The Gargoyles. She also said she watched movies and soaps all the time.

During her interview she had very strong feelings about her perception that there was a large amount of violence in the U.S. She said that news shows and movies showed her the reality of the situation in the U.S. though she did believe that certain things were giving a false sense of “reality.”

### **Interview 11: Wilberth Hernandez**

Wilberth, 21, was born in Leon. He finished high school and was working selling insurance. His mom lives and works in Panama while his dad works in the marketplace.

He said that he knew three or four people that had been to the U.S. They have told him that the U.S. is a very beautiful place that is economically prosperous. Some people, however, work day and night to make more money and better their lives, they also have told him.

Wilberth watches about 14 hours a week, mostly during the day. He only receives the national channels in his home. The shows that he watches include “The Simpsons,” “Fresh Prince of Bel Air,” “Married With Children,” and “Baywatch.”

He felt that there were too many American programs on national television. He said that he wanted more Latin American shows that were not soap operas on these channels.

Wilberth believed that there were two realities in the U.S. He thought that while Americans enjoyed certain prosperity and lifestyle, which was evident in television shows, they also had to live a stressful life to achieve a certain status. Furthermore, Wilberth believed that crime and violence were very significant in the U.S. and that an American lived in more fear than a Nicaraguan.

### **Interview 12: Rosa Mendez**

Rosa Mendez, 21, was born in Leon. She is in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of Business Administration at the University of Commercial Sciences. She also works at the university as an administrator’s assistant. She lives only with her mother who is a housewife. She doesn’t have contact with her father. They both graduated from high school.

She knows several people that have traveled to the U.S. They have told her that life is very difficult in the U.S. Their comments have mostly been related to the difficulties for immigrants in the U.S.

She has only the national channels in her house and watches about 18 hours of television during the week. She mostly watches soap operas. She doesn’t tune in regularly to many series but did talk about “Beverly Hills 90210” and “Baywatch.” She also talked about shows on Univision like the “Cristina” a sensational talk show on that channel.

Along with Noemy, Rosa was very reticent during the interview. She acknowledged that U.S. citizens do enjoy many privileges that are not available in Nicaragua such as jobs and health care. She also believed that Nicaragua’s culture, in the form of religion and peer pressure, was often an obstacle in the development of a woman. Furthermore, she believed that violence on television and “scandalous” talk shows like “Crisitina” on Univision were bad for “impressionable” youth.

### **Interview 13: Guillermo Senteno**

Guillermo Senteno, 23, was born in Leon. He is studying to be a pharmacist. He is married and works about 5 hours a day as a key maker in a little shop in the market that is owned by his dad. The interview was conducted at the market while he worked. His

dad works at the shop and at a hardware store nearby. His mom is a housewife. They both only had basic schooling.

He did not know anyone that had traveled to the United States besides his mom. Her comments on the U.S were more about the beauty of the country.

Guillermo said he watches about 40 hours a week, most of which are on weekends. He said that he usually wakes up around 6 a.m. and the first thing he puts turns on are international news programs, especially CNN in Spanish. He said he is also very committed to reading the newspaper. Several figures that he gave were very accurate.

He doesn't have cable where he lives with his wife, but often goes over to mom's house to watch cable. Among the shows he liked was "Beverly Hills 90210," "That 70s Show," "Dark Angel," the "Wonder Years." He identified a lot with Kevin, the main character from the "Wonder Years" because of the similarities he perceived between the character and himself. He also watches the Discovery Channel. He said that he would welcome more American shows on national channels because he is bored with the soap operas that make up a large part of the programming. He would also like to see more MTV.

Although he watched a lot of fictional series he most often cited news programs and documentary type programming (i.e. the Discovery Channel) as the basis of his opinions.

APPENDIX D  
INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

**Note:** Given the nature of the study, some of the questions outlined in this form needed a few follow up questions and were also rearranged depending on the direction the interview was taking.

**Part 1: General Questions**

How old are you?

What do you do for a living? How many years of schooling did you receive? (Probe to learn about the person's background in terms of education, income, and social class)

Have you ever traveled to the United States? If yes, what was your experience while in the States? Did you make any friends while there? Do you have any contact with American friends in Nicaragua? (Probe for detailed account of what subject perceived about American lifestyle)

**Part 2: General Questions About Television Viewing**

1) Did you watch television today? Yesterday? During the past week? For how long? Where were you – at home, or somewhere else? Do you have cable or satellite?

2) About how much television do you watch? (Probe for self-assessment. Does viewer consider himself/herself a heavy viewer?)

3) What are your favorite television programs? (Probe for name of specific programs. Ask 'any other?' at least three times, to try to expand the list of favorites. Make special note of any American programs.)

4) Why do you like those programs? (Probe for motivations for viewing that would indicate any relationship to the United States or its values, practices, material life, or other aspects of the country.)

5) Who are your favorite television characters (if any)? Why? Do you relate somehow to the life they lead on television?

6) Do you watch [name of American program]? Why or why no? ( Probe for reasons that would indicate the attractiveness of some aspect of America or American life as portrayed in the programs)

7) Where do you usually watch television? Alone or with friends? Is there a particular room in the house where you like to get comfortable?

8) Do you have a preference between the production/ look of television programming from the South American countries such as Venezuela or Colombia, as opposed to say the United States? Why? What do you think the main differences are?

9) Do you think some of the television networks in Nicaragua should run more U.S. programming? Why or why not? (Probe for detailed reasons of what the subject might or might not want to see)

10) The criticism of television in general is that it does not accurately portray reality. What are your thoughts on that? (Probably the last question)

### **Part 3: Specific Questions About U.S. Lifestyles**

Would you like to live in the United States? Why or why or not?  
(Depending on this answer, the interview could take one of numerous turns which include the following questions):

Do Americans have a lot of time of leisure and rest? What do Americans Do On Weekends? On time off from work? What percentage of leisure time is spent in a social atmosphere such as partying? How would you compare this to the things Nicaraguan citizens do on their free time?

Do you think the U.S. is more violent than Nicaragua? In general do you think there are more cops in the U.S.? Why or why not? What would you say the most common crimes committed in the U.S. are? Are those the same as in Nicaragua?

Are there more employment opportunities in the U.S. than in Nicaragua? What type of job do you think most Americans have? Office? Factory? Manual Labor? Professional? (Probe for distinctive features that might be different between the two countries.)

How would you define success? Materials? Prestige? Merit? Family? What type of possessions do they have in the United States that you might not find in Nicaragua?

Is there a distinctive class system in the U.S.? Is race, gender, ethnicity a factor in this class system? In success? Why or Why not?

Do women work more than men? Who would you say normally should take care of kids in general? How are things done in the United States (in terms of last question)? Are there more women in workplace?

**Part 4: Questions on Specific Television Programs:**

(This will depend largely on some of the examples that the interviewee provides and the background research on the programming on television in Nicaragua.)

Would you like to be more like your favorite character [name of character] Would you like to dress like [name of character]? Have his or her career?

Do you think the set of characters in [series] would be good friends to have in real life? Why or why not? Are the lives these characters live anything like what you experience in your daily life?

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