Marketer Acculturation: The Changer and the Changed

Adapting to consumers from another culture is a quintessential task for marketers in the global marketplace. This research investigates marketers’ processes of multicultural learning and adaptation using ethnographic methods in a longitudinal study of an ethnic marketplace in the United States. The authors define individual marketer acculturation that consists of learning and translation processes, adaptation strategies, and their outcomes. The findings indicate that marketers serve as bicultural mediators, both accommodating their consumers and working to alter their consumption patterns to bring them into line with their own ethnic and larger U.S. national market customs. Marketers’ adaptation to the cultural characteristics and needs of their clientele results in changes to themselves, their firms, consumers, and, ultimately, the marketplace. The authors contribute to a theoretical understanding of the complex dialectical relationships between marketers and consumers, which together constitute culture in the contemporary marketplace.

The rising economic and communications interdependence of the world means that nations, however unified internally, must nonetheless operate in an increasingly multicultural global environment. Ironically, a world that is coming together pop culturally and commercially is a world whose discrete subnational ethnic and religious and racial parts are also far more in evidence (Barber 1996, p. 11).

In the preceding quote, Barber (1996) recognizes two major forces for cultural change: global market integration is the result of corporate expansion and ethnic differentiation as the result of persistent racial, religious, and national interests. Examples of ethnic conflict include the Los Angeles riots of the early 1990s (Hunt 1996; Min 1996), the ongoing armed struggles in Algeria and Bosnia, and the immigrant versus resident clashes currently taking place in Western Europe (Draxler 1997) and North America. Although it is a source of tension, ethnicity provides a powerful basis for the identity and community of its members.

Barber (1996), similar to a growing number of marketing scholars (cf. Costa and Bannossey 1995), is interested in the ways cultural and market forces unite and divide people. The market separates people by distinguishing them on the basis of their sociodemographic characteristics and other consumption patterns. It unites them by assembling people with similar characteristics, ideas, and behaviors; providing products, services, media, and social spaces that reinforce cultural identities; and promoting the consumption of cultural market artifacts. Interactions between cultures and markets are accelerated in the global economy.

This research is positioned at the nexus of ethnicity and the market as distinct forces spurring contemporary intercultural contact and change. The distinguishing characteristic of the contemporary global market is marketers and consumers positioned within and traversing multiple cultural spheres. In this research, we strive to understand the marketing implications of these multicultural market juxtapositions by investigating marketers’ processes of learning and adapting to consumers of other cultures.

The illustration in Figure 1 cleverly shows some troublesome assumptions underlying conceptualizations of marketplace diversity in the dress of the characters and the titles of the respective books. First, cultural differences often are conceptualized as a matter of marketers of one culture learning to target consumers of another culture. Although consumers have been noted to acculturate (Peñaloza 1994), marketers have not. This simplification expedites the conduct of research, yet remains a reduction of the contemporary marketplace, in which marketers and consumers of multiple cultures adapt to each other simultaneously. Second, organizations typically are structured such that those in marketing managerial roles charged with developing multicultural strategies are removed from day-to-day interactions with consumers, yet these are primary sites for cultural learning. As a related point, market researchers typically investigate culture indirectly, through marketer and consumer respondents. As a result, the literature retains an idiosyncratic quality, composed of references to disparate cultural groups and market practices, with less attention to generalized adaptation processes and their contexts.

We empirically examine marketer acculturation, defined as the general processes of movement and adaptation by marketers of one cultural market system to consumers of another cultural market system.1 This is part of an eight-year

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1Acculturation is a general term that encompasses intercultural interaction and adaptation and includes assimilation of a new culture, maintenance of the old culture, and resistance to both new and old cultures. Adaptation is broader than acculturation, in that it refers to responses to outside stimuli, both cultural and noncultural. Consumer acculturation is used to refer to intercultural contact and the resulting change for consumers in contact with a new culture; marketer acculturation is used to refer to intercultural contact and the resulting change for marketers in contact with a new culture of consumers.

We begin by reviewing the literature on ethnicity, acculturation, and market learning and then discuss the ethnographic methods used to collect data for critical interpretive analysis. The ethnographic account provides a descriptive overview of the field site and participants, from which we develop an empirical model. The model that emerged from the data describes the acculturation process implemented by the individual marketer as he or she learned and translated language and cultural customs and developed adaptation strategies to work effectively with consumers and other acculturation agents. Marketers acculturated themselves into their consumers' culture, reproduced elements of multiple cultures, developed the community, socially validated Mexican consumers in the United States, and forged a dialectical relationship with consumers.

Our research contributes to marketing theory and practice by furthering substantive understandings of intercultural market dynamics. Culture is a fundamental aspect of marketing phenomena, with increasing relevance in the global era. We examine the interconnections of many aspects of culture in the marketplace: consumers' ethnic culture, marketers' ethnic and organizational culture, and national culture. At the heart of this work is an examination of marketers attempting to capitalize on ethnic consumers' buying power, with attention to how it was exercised and, in turn, reacted to and mobilized with and against by marketers. Finally, we discuss the implications of marketers' cultural activities in markets increasingly composed of transnational migratory movements of consumers, products and services, and companies. By investigating microprocesses of intercultural learning and adaptation, this work helps marketing theoreticians and managers alike understand the intricacies of the global market.

**Multidisciplinary Theoretical Foundations**

Cultural pluralism is the Western experience of the real postmodernization of the world, the ethnization and cultural pluralization of a dehomogenizing, dehomonogenizing world incapable of a formerly enforced politics of assimilation or cultural hierarchy (Friedman 1994, p. 100).

In building our theoretical framework, we draw from work on ethnicity, acculturation, and market orientation in anthropology, economics, and marketing. Whereas work on ethnicity and acculturation emphasizes cultural contact and change, work on market orientation emphasizes the organizational context of marketer acculturation. Intercultural contact and adaptation is the defining feature of the global marketplace. Once argued the purview of war, conquest, and colonization (Padilla 1980), acculturation increasingly is brought about by the market forces of immigration (Cornellus, Martin, and Holtfield 1997), international trade (Costa and Barrossey 1995), and tourism (Bell 1993). Both domestically and internationally, cultural adaptation occurs as the result of interactions along diverse social demographics (e.g., race/ethnicity, social class, gender) and geographic...
This paradox stems partly from the way culture operates; it seldom is recognized except in terms of differences between two or more groups. The paradox also stems from a unidirectional view of the interrelationships between culture and market phenomena such that culture is partitioned and held static, almost as if marketers had no culture at all or their activities had no cultural effect on consumers. Bodewyn (1981) criticizes marketing studies in which cultural factors are compared across countries with little sense of the impact of marketing activities. Observes Bouchet (1995, p. 69, emphasis added), "Many marketers tend to adopt an attitude toward ethnicity and cultural identity in which they consider the market from the outside, without really realizing that their understanding of it and the actions they take toward it in fact contribute to further manifestations of cultural identity and ethnicity."

Nevertheless, there is growing evidence to suggest that cultural differences affect marketers' behavior in ways parallel to their effects on consumers. Deshpande, Farley, and Webster (1993) examine organizational culture in Japanese firms; Tse and colleagues (1998) compare executive decision making in China, Hong Kong, and Canada; and Campbell and colleagues (1998) note national differences in negotiation processes in France, Germany, the United Kingdom, and the United States. However, these studies have focused on marketers' culture in relation to other marketers. Our work studies marketers' culture in relation to consumers, posing basic theoretical questions such as the following: Do marketers have a culture related to marketing activities in the same way we refer to consumer culture? If so, what is the nature of its characteristics and adaptation processes? And how would marketer acculturation processes vary in concert with consumers of different cultures?

Market Learning
Market orientation, with its emphasis on "the development of knowledge or insights that have the potential to influence behavior" (Slater and Narver 1995, p. 63), helped provide a foundation for studies of marketer acculturation. Jaworski and Kohli (1993) and Shapiro (1988) note the importance of a customer focus in achieving a market orientation, and Day (1994) emphasizes direct contact with customers. However, such work has considered only firms that are part of the same culture as their customers. The literature's focus on large firms may be responsible for its omission of cross-cultural learning as a result of its emphasis on human resource issues and industry competition. In contrast, we focus on retailer interaction with multicultural customers. Retail marketing is a good site for investigating marketer acculturation because direct contact with consumers is an important factor in cultural learning, as is the specific cultural context of the interactions at the level of the neighborhood and larger cultural relations.

Regarding organizational learning processes, Garvin (1993) emphasizes systematic problem solving and transferring knowledge quickly and efficiently throughout the firm. Slater and Narver (1997) distinguish among learning from others, from experience, and by experiment. Marketer acculturation likely shares these general organizational learning modes but differs as the result of the type of learning involved in adapting to consumers of another culture.
Intercultural Market Adaptation

Knowledge and experience of other cultures is acquired in reference to and in terms of a person’s own culture, within a context of larger social relations (Rubinow and Sullivan 1987). Thus, we investigate marketers’ cultural adaptation within the context of cultural relations in the area. Because the majority of consumers and marketers at this site were Mexicans living in the United States, we focus on U.S.-Mexican relations in discussing this point, though issues related to the presence of Korean, Cuban, Lebanese, and Israeli immigrant marketers also are acknowledged. U.S.-Mexican relations have been strained for 200 years. Early disputes centered on land and resource ownership, and conflict continues over appropriate development and treatment of each other’s people (Acuña 1988, 1996; Peralta 1995). For years, U.S. firms have been charged with extracting natural resources, emphasizing export crops over local sustenance, labor injustice, and pollution in Mexico, even as they have been credited with providing jobs, creating wealth, and elevating the standard of living for Mexicans in the United States and Mexico.

Most recently, the increasing proportion of minority consumers in the United States and, subsequently, the visibility of minority markets (e.g., Fisher 1991) have strained cultural relations in the United States. Recent English-only, anti-immigration, anti-affirmative action, and antibilingual education initiatives may be viewed as reactions to these trends. To this day, networks of Latinos/as and Anglos extend beyond both sides of the U.S.-Mexican border. Inter-cultural contact is stimulated by international labor and capital migration, tourism, and trade, all further accelerated by the North American Free Trade Agreement.

For our purposes, the key focuses were whether and how the match between the ethnicity of merchants and consumers affected market activities. The marketplace has become a primary avenue for cultural expression, with an unprecedented array of cultural possibilities (Firat and Venkatesh 1995). On the one hand, cultural insiders have an advantage in their ethnic markets due to intimate knowledge of consumers’ customs and product and service preferences (Kaufman and Hernández 1991). Furthermore, having a strong entrepreneurial base in an ethnic community has been considered instrumental in community development (Portes and Bach 1985). On the other hand, cultural conflict has been concomitant with the presence of multiple cultures in the marketplace. Economic discrimination and segregation based on cultural characteristics form the basis of ethnic economics and partially explain cultural differences in self-

Employment. The U.S. Bureau of the Census (1992b) reports the following figures for self-employment as a percentage of total employment: Mexican 6.8%, Anglo 11.2%, Korean 27.9%, Israeli 28.6%, and African-American 4.4%. Self-employment has driven the social mobility of immigrants, whose self-employment is greater than native residents for most ethnic groups (Bobjas 1986). Less advantaged U.S. minority groups, blacks and Mexicans demonstrate the lowest levels of self-employment (Farrill and Meyer 1996, U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992b).

Furthermore, as previously mentioned, there is evidence that cultural differences between marketers and consumers are not conducive to business success or community development. Such businesses appear particularly vulnerable to cultural misunderstandings and even violence, especially when aggravated by a larger climate of persistent economic differences and disparities in police and government treatment. In a study of more than 200 riots that occurred in major U.S. cities in 1966-67, Licht (1972) notes blacks’ troubles with white retailers “ripping them off.” The 1990 riots in Los Angeles between black and Latino consumers and white and Korean merchants began in protest of the acquittal of white police officers charged in beating African-American Rodney King, with economic disparities listed among the causes (Hunt 1996).

Nevertheless, there are precedents for community support from cultural outsiders, though they are somewhat controversial. Mainstream advertising in the Spanish language has been recognized in support of Latino culture (O’Quinn and Meyer 1984), and major U.S. corporations such as Anheuser-Busch and Atlantic Richfield regularly contribute to Hispanic and black community organizations. In addition, tourism has provided an economic basis for renewing and strengthening minority cultural traditions (Friedman 1994). Even so, community organizations grapple with their dependence on outside contributions.

Our field site exhibited a localized struggle for maintaining an ethnic presence relative to a dominant group, and marketing activities were an influential agent. Mexican immigrant consumers predominated, with mainstream consumers joining in celebrating Mexican holidays. Thus, the site was similar to Olvera Street in Los Angeles, though on a smaller scale. Olvera Street, once inhabited predominantly by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans, has become a year-round tourist attraction where white consumers are predominant (Acuña 1996).

In summary, this research focuses on marketers’ cultural learning and adaptation processes as they are situated within the context of organizational imperatives and cultural relations. The logic of the market appears to operate through marketers’ routine business activities and interactions with consumers as a localized cultural variant of larger sociocultural relations. In markets increasingly characterized by the

4 For further discussion of relations between U.S. residents and Korean immigrant businesses, see Min (1996); for Israeli merchants, see Cohn (1996); for Lebanese immigrants, see Kayal and Kawai (1975); and for Cuban immigrant business relations, see Portes and Bach (1985).

5 Anti-minority and anti-immigration sentiments historically have followed economic downturns (Langefors 1992). To date, globalization has had a disquieting effect on the U.S. economy in the form of unprecedented growth in stock value occurring simultaneously with persistent urban unemployment, job losses, and benefit and wage deterioration.

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juxtaposition of heterogeneous cultures, documenting the
specific processes of market acculturation is a valuable
contribution to the literature.

Critical Ethnographic Research
Methodology

Culture—the shared meanings, practices, and symbols that
constitute the human world—does not present itself neu-
trally or with one voice. It is always multivoiced and
overdetermined, and both the observer and the observed
are always enmeshed in it; that is our situation (Rabinow

Ethnographic methods were selected for their long-standing
tradition in studying cultural phenomena (Clifford 1988).
We employed participant observation, depth interviews, and
photography as data collection techniques, with field notes,
journal entries, photographs, and artifacts (i.e., business fly-
ers, cards, and local newspapers) serving as data for inter-
pretive analysis. Critical ethnography is distinguished by the
influences of critical theorists (Ozanne and Murray 1991),
anthropologists (Miller 1997), and, most recently, postcolo-
nial scholars (Appadurai 1996; Bhabha 1994) interested in
modernity and globalization. Of interest in this work were
the power relations between marketers and consumers, with
emphasis on including participants’ issues and exploring
local economic dimensions of the phenomena of interest.

Field Site

The marketplace site was a business center that consisted of
a four-block area of retail stores in a Mexican community in
southern California. Cultural spheres of ethnicity over-
lapped and transcended national borders. Shopkeepers
were predominantly Latino/a and Asian, though a few were Anglo
and Middle Eastern, and many were immigrants. Consumers
were predominantly from Mexico, but also included native
Mexican-Americans and other Latino/as, as well as Central
and South American immigrants. There was a minority of
non-Latino customers and employees of city and county of-
ces. Sixty percent of the surrounding city was Latino/a, ac-
cording to the 1990 U.S. Census (U.S. Bureau of the Census
1992a), and observations indicated Spanish was the pre-
dominant language used to conduct business.

Emergent Design

We began with a question regarding the nature of marketers’
influences on Mexican immigrant consumers’ acculturation.
Data collected from January 1991 through May 1991 on
consumer acculturation (Peñaloza 1994) were reanalyzed.
During the summer of 1991, additional fieldwork was con-
ducted, including interviews with 15 marketers. Questions
pertained to business history; the experience of the respec-
tive employee, manager, or owner with this and other cul-
tural clientele; customer characteristics and behaviors; and
comprehensive marketing strategies. The last question, open-ended, queried marketers about their issues of concern
in the area.

Retail participants were selected with the goal of achiev-
ing variation in the size and type of business, number of
years in business, and individual ethnicity, nationality, and

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>Nationality/Ethnicity</th>
<th>Position</th>
<th>Language Ability</th>
<th>Type of Store</th>
<th>Years in Business (1991)</th>
<th>Employees</th>
<th>Cultural Rapport</th>
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</thead>
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<tr>
<td>Lily Fuentes</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
<td>Beatriz Pena</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Fruit stand</td>
<td>1 month</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lian Ming</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Korean, English, and Spanish</td>
<td>Women's clothing</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sangkil Chen</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Korean</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Korean and English</td>
<td>Discount department store</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>Weak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Raúl Martínez</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mexican-American</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>English and Spanish</td>
<td>Discount department store</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Carla Buenmayor</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Spanish</td>
<td>Bridal shop</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben Bendayan</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Lebanese</td>
<td>Manager</td>
<td>English and Spanish</td>
<td>Men's clothing</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>Fair</td>
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<td>52</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Korean</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
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<td>35</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Sales</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Men's clothing</td>
<td>12</td>
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<td>Grocery</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<td>José Pérez</td>
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<td>M</td>
<td>Mexican</td>
<td>Manager</td>
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<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<tr>
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<td>130</td>
<td>Good</td>
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<td>M</td>
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<td>2</td>
<td>Weak</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Owner</td>
<td>English and Spanish</td>
<td>Jewelry</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oscar Hijuelos</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>Cuban</td>
<td>Owner</td>
<td>Spanish and English</td>
<td>Grocery</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>Good</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes: Language ability is listed in the order it was acquired by each retailer.
reflects collaborative work; therefore, we use plural pronouns elsewhere in the article.9

The Marketer Acculturation Process

The Field Site

The site is a major urban shopping street in the city of San Pueblo in southern California. It consists of a four-block area containing 11 jewelry stores, 11 clothing stores (6 men’s, 4 women’s, and 1 children’s), 6 bridal shops, 5 shoe stores, 3 discount department stores, 3 photography studios, 3 restaurants, 3 grocery stores, 2 beauty shops and a beauty supply store, 2 electronics stores, a bank, a travel agency, a video rental shop, a pawn shop, a check-cashing operation, a sporting goods store, a gift shop, a church, a theater, and the office of the Mexican Consul. Many of the stores are in close proximity to their direct competitors; this is particularly true for the jewelry, clothing, and shoe stores. The bank, one of the shoe stores, and one of the jewelry stores are local branches of Mexican companies. Of 60 store names recorded, 35 were in Spanish and 25 were in English. Both Spanish and English names relate to the type of businesses and their owners, as well as the clientele, using terms such as El Mexicano, Latino, Maya, and Indo.

The site is bounded by low-rent apartments,8 a Catholic church, City Hall, and two high-rise apartment complexes for the elderly. Buildings are two and three stories tall, with stores fronting on the first level and offices on the upper floors. Many of the buildings date to the late 1800s and form a hodgepodge of architectural design as the result of renovations during the years. All stores feature prominent window displays of merchandise, and some use tables or racks set on the sidewalk (Photo 1). Billboards grace the tops of a few buildings, advertising HBO, the Transit Authority, Cigna

8The shifts in pronouns are awkward, yet any other arrangement would have been inaccurate.

9Low by California standards was $700 per month for a two-bedroom flat.

PHOTO 1

Window displays and tables of merchandise.

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According to the county historical society’s brochures, Anglo John Smith is credited with founding the city in 1869, despite earlier settlements of Native American, Spanish, and Mexican people in the area (Heritage County 1986).10 The city experienced waves of economic booms and busts, which were the result of the gold rush in the mid-1800s, the discovery of oil in the 1920s, and military contracts through the 1940s and 1950s. The area declined in the 1960s as people moved to suburbs linked conveniently by highway to job sites and more glamorous shopping centers. Shopkeepers renovated buildings, attempting to lure Anglo customers back downtown, but with little success. Economic activity in the area was so depressed then that buildings sold for as little as $25,000, noted David Morales, husband of jeweler Lily Puente. In 1980, $25 million in federal funds boosted the renovations of those buildings with historic status (Heritage County 1986). Yet even this did not succeed in bringing Anglo shoppers back, as evidenced by residential patterns (U.S. Bureau of the Census 1992a) and my observations.

By the time I began fieldwork in 1989, the area was in the midst of another economic rejuvenation. The area was pulsing with life—vehicles and pedestrians constantly coming and going. The steady rhythm of shuffling feet could be heard, interspersed with bits of Spanish conversation, laughter, Latin music, and the sing-songy voices of street vendors hawking their wares. Most of the stores and stands were thriving, some with people standing in lines to buy. Decorations featured colorful murals, pilasters, banners, and Mexican flags (Photo 2). Signs in combinations of Spanish and English languages promoted the products and services of U.S. and Mexican firms as shopkeepers actively catered to the predominantly Latino/a clientele (Photo 3).

I logged various combinations of pedestrians moving along sidewalks on both sides of the street. They were overwhelmingly Latino/a and included nuclear and extended families; young and older couples, many with young children; groups of young and older men and women; and several single men and an occasional pair of police officers on their beat. Roughly one-quarter were dressed in suits and dresses; the remainder wore casual clothes, except on Sundays. Activities included strolling up and down the street seeing others and being seen, widow shopping, buying and

10Historical omissions such as this are erroneous and have limited the ability to grasp the significant presence of the architecture and culture in the area to this day. According to Anglo accounts, Mexican territory was won over to democracy. Mexican and Mexican-American accounts describe conquest and colonization. For a well-documented account of the gradual displacement of land ownership in the U.S. southwest from Mexican to U.S. people, see Acuña (1988). The Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which ended the Mexican-American War, granted full citizenship rights to Mexican people who opted to stay. This treaty remains the basis for recurring antidiscrimination initiatives by Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the southwest United States.
selling, tending to children, conversing, and eating available snacks.

Exchanges were not limited to stores, however. Stands and pushcarts offered music cassette tapes, newspapers and magazines, gifts, and snacks (Photo 4). In addition, vendors sold jewelry, imitation brand-name perfume, or dudled cassette tapes from attaché cases. Twice I was approached by a man hawking watches he had fixed. The watches were largest. At times, small groups of men gathered in semicircles passing $10 and $20 bills back and forth, betting under which of three baby food jars lids a bean had been hidden. As if on signal, they disappeared as fast as they had come.

The Marketers

Of the retailers interviewed, 12 were immigrants, with a range of ethnic and occupational backgrounds, including Latinos, non-Latinos, Asians, Middle Easterners, professionals, sales personnel, and business owners (see Table 1). Owners' reasons for selecting the area included the large number and type of people who frequented the area, its central location, and the reasonable cost of retail space. They indicated their appreciation for their Latino/a customers and their volume of business. All 15 retailers reported that their customers were predominantly Mexican and spoke Spanish. Others were more specific in describing their clientele as from rural areas in Mexico and of the lower classes, for the most part.

Noted store manager Raúl Martínez, in a matter-of-fact tone, "The upper classes speak English and don't need the services provided here."

That consumers were predominantly working-class Mexicans was consistent with my observations over the years. Exceptions were an occasional Anglo city employee or senior citizen in the Worthenore department store; an occasional Anglo frequenting the pawn shop, the check-cashing store, or one of the bridal shops; a few well-dressed Latinos/as surveying the jewelry and video stores; and the groups of Anglos attending the Mexican holiday celebrations.

Merchants promoted merchandise with large signs and sidewalk displays. Discounts and sales were everywhere. Signs blurred, for example: "VENTA! [SALE!] 50% OFF!
BUY ONE, GET ONE FREE! CREDITO FACIL! [EASY CREDIT!] NO ENGANCHE! [NO DOWN PAYMENT]!"

Looking at them, a customer might think the stores were giving items away! I recalled María Inés, a consumer interviewed previously (Peralta 1994), telling me of the beautiful merchandise she had seen on her first shopping trip in the United States. Taken for granted by native residents, merchandise available in the United States made a big impression on many Mexican consumers, especially because it was targeted to them. The "easy payment, no money down" signs were noteworthy because credit remained inaccessible for most people in Mexico. Rendering these offerings even
more appealing were the prices, which were significantly lower than in Mexico, even as most Mexican immigrants' earnings in the United States were much higher.\footnote{Victor, one of the consumers, noted that whereas in Mexico it took him a month to earn $100, in the United States he could earn that amount in three days (Pfafflin 1994). Since then, as the result of the peso devaluations of the 1990s, making a living in Mexico has become even more difficult.\footnote{There is increasing minority activity on the Web (Larsen and Wilhelm 1994); however, persistent economic differences between Latinos and Americans as a whole permit a technological gap in the future. In 1996, Latino household income totaled $24,906, whereas that of all U.S. residents was $35,492 (Zeidler 1997). Because Latinos are double counted in this measure, comparisons such as this andresistimate income differentials.}}

Consumption needs were related to resettling and maintaining contact with family members back home. Those who had come with nothing sought clothing and home furnishings, as well as staple foods and amenities. In addition, immigrants bought for relatives in Mexico, sent monetary remittances totaling $3.7 billion in 1996 (Cornellius, Orozco, and Barrantes 1997), and traveled regularly between the two countries. Mexican immigrants improved their lives and those of their families dramatically in a relatively short period of time upon coming to the United States, and these improvements contextualized their interactions with marketers.

Merchants typically positioned themselves strategically at the front of the stores to greet the steady flow of people passing by, welcoming them into the store (Photo 5) and handing out promotional flyers. The most distinct promotional form observed was a young boy standing in front of an electronics store, microphone in hand, singing his greetings to people walking by and beckoning them into the store. This personalized approach contrasts with the increasing use of technological mediation in mainstream market interactions using the Internet and telephone.\footnote{Individual and Company Characteristics. In Figure 2, we present the empirical model of individual marketer acculturation. Marketer acculturation is initiated whenever a marketer approaches a culturally distinct group of consumers and consists of the learning and adaptation processes employed in the formulation of appropriate marketing strategies. These adaptation processes should be viewed as part of a larger web of ongoing, multidirectional cultural interactions.}

Individuals and Company Characteristics

In Figure 2, we present the empirical model of individual marketer acculturation. Marketer acculturation is initiated whenever a marketer approaches a culturally distinct group of consumers and consists of the learning and adaptation processes employed in the formulation of appropriate marketing strategies. These adaptation processes should be viewed as part of a larger web of ongoing, multidirectional cultural interactions.

Language ability overlapped somewhat with nationality/ethnicity. Speaking Spanish was a big advantage, particularly when acquired as the first language. Recalling her recent experience selling a videocassette recorder, during which the customer came back twice to learn to use it, Lily Fuentez stated, "They know if they go where they [the salespersons] speak English that they can’t explain to them." Speaking the language also was critical in building cultural rapport, as Lian Ming noted:

At the beginning I couldn’t speak Spanish ... but as I started to learn I started to communicate with my customers. Before it was impossible because I needed a translator, and now we can directly communicate and they talk about their families and their jobs. They talk about the clothes and we have gotten more closer and I think that is important.

In Table 1, we show participants’ languages in the order of their acquisition. The six Mexicans and one Cuban had acquired Spanish in their respective countries of origin, as had David López, a Mexican-American born and raised in the United States. Non-Latino merchants, all of whom were immigrants, already had learned English and were learning Spanish, which they reported was less difficult. Although both Mexican-Americans María Hernández and Raúl Martínez and Korean Lian Ming learned Spanish later in life, the Mexican-Americans demonstrated a cultural advantage in pronunciation.

For those who could not speak Spanish, disadvantages were partially overcome by hiring Spanish-speaking employees. These employees provided valuable cultural knowledge and skills, yet in some cases hindered merchants’ learning. In 1991, Lian Ming, Arthur Zimmerman,
and Yang Su Kim could not speak Spanish and had hired Spanish-speaking employees. By 1996, Ming distinguished herself from the others in her active involvement in serving customers, whereas Zimmerman and Kim continued to rely on their employees.

Sex differences were manifest in the manner of address and the nature of customer contact. Women demonstrated and reported moreeway in addressing consumers than did the men, who repeatedly related the imporpetuity of addressing a woman in a man and woman pair or group. These gendere roles partially explain the greater inclination of the women to be more attentive and personable with consumers.

Age differences in language acquisition replicated those previously noted in consumer acculturation (Petraitz, 1994), with extent of customer contact a contributing factor. Lan Ming and Ben Bendayan, in their early 30s and late 20s, respectively, demonstrated their improved ability to speak Spanish five years after their first meeting, whereas the elderly Yang Su Kim, his wife, and Sangkil Chen had not made much progress during this same time.

Jobpositon affected informants' cultural adaptation as a function of the amount of contact with consumers, which was itself a function of the size of the firm. Sales positions required direct contact with consumers, but owners and managers of small firms experienced direct customer contact on a regular basis as well. Those in larger firms—Raul Martinez, Oscar Hijuelos, and David Lopez—all had offices off the sales floor yet maintained close contact with their sales employees by walking the floor and working with them on particular problems. It was more likely to find them on the floor than in their offices, and our interviews were interrupted repeatedly by employees with pending customer or supplier issues.

Company characteristics. Company characteristics included type and size of business, years in operation, and cultural rapport. Regarding type of business, those selling nondurable products experienced more frequent contact with consumers, as expected, yet even durable products businesses had frequent contact with customers in the form of weekly credit payments and service support.

Regardless of size of business, smaller businesses necessarily relied on the learning experiences of fewer employees. This put them at a disadvantage, particularly the Asian and Middle Eastern marketers who relied primarily on family members and friends. Larger firms had the advantage of a greater number of employees whose range of cultural skills extended the organization's cultural competence and sped up its learning processes.

Number of years in business displayed a learning curve over time, as a function of cumulative cultural experiences and more efficient learning. As the cultural abilities and skills of personnel become more enhanced, they and others in the firm became attuned to the culture and how it worked.
For example, electronics store owner Arthur Zimmerman, in business only one year, relied heavily on a dictionary and Spanish-speaking employees; whereas Ben Bendayan, in business five years, had gained a greater sense of consumers' cultural behaviors as the result of his improved ability to speak Spanish and increased interactions with employees and customers. Cultural rapport refers to the quality of firms' interactions with consumers. It is a function of collective knowledge and experience with this and other cultural clienteles and is reflected in the extent of firms' patronage. Many of the retailers had sold to Mexican people before, and their knowledge and experience were directly applicable. Exhibiting less direct transferability but generating cultural insight nonetheless were merchants' experiences with other Latin Americans, blacks, and Middle Easterners.

**Influential Agents**

Similar to more general market learning processes, marketer acculturation entailed listening to, observing, and interacting with others. Agents included consumers, family, employees, channel members, competitors, other retailers, the marketplace, and business associations, with distinctions related to language and customs. Learning appropriate products and services was expedited when marketers could understand customers' requests. Oscar Hijuelos, the Cuban grocery store owner, explained how he learned to serve Mexican customers by listening to them ask for the items they preferred:

Aquí, la población más grande que hay es Latino ... y ellos son los que consumen más comida. Yo no soy de México, y nunca he estado en México, pero, sí, que ellos se sienten muy bien aquí. Ellos se sienten como si estuvieran en una tienda en México porque ellos me lo han dicho los Mexicanos. Sabe, se sienten como si estuvieran en un sitio en México porque encuentran todos los artículos de ellos, que ellos consumen, que algunas tiendas no tienen, pero nosotros los tenemos. Sí, los traemos porque hay clientes que nos los piden.

(Here, the population that is largest is Latino ... and these are the ones who consume more food. I'm not from Mexico, and have never been to Mexico, but, yes, I know that people feel very good here. They feel like they were in a store in Mexico because they have told me so, those from Mexico. You know, they feel like they were in a store in Mexico because they can find all the products, the ones they consume, that other stores do not have, but we have them. Yes, we have them because our clients ask for them.)

Family members and employees served as key sources of information about consumers, particularly in small, family-run retail firms. In the larger businesses, particularly those with managers culturally distanced from consumers, employees were a key source of cultural market knowledge. Cuban grocer Oscar Hijuelos employed six Mexican butchers, benefiting from their knowledge of consumers' preferences for fresh meat, thinly sliced, with the visible fat removed. Channel members from multiple cultures were instrumental to marketers in helping them formulate appropriate assortments. Lian Ming noted that Asian and Latino suppliers kept her informed about successful new products, and from their suggestions, she would try a few items to determine customers' responses. Over time, she felt more secure in her ability to anticipate what her customers were looking for in colors and styles of clothes, yet they would surprise her at times. Raúl Martínez added that he learned what was selling in Mexico in conversations with channel members and then strove to sell in quantity what was selling in Mexico. Keeping up with trends was particularly important for fashionable clothing, shoes, and music.

Merchants also learned about the culture of their consumers by observing and emulating competitors and other retailers, both in this marketplace and others. The influence of other retailers took place individually and collectively, in the form of the marketplace as a whole. Examples were the sidewalk displays and marketing techniques, such as bargaining, that had spread rapidly from retailer to retailer. They recalled similar merchandising techniques at markets in Mexico, and I noted that competitors were in close proximity in both countries.

Marketers learned by comparing their business with others in the consumers' home countries, as well as in other areas with high concentrations of subcultural members. David López, manager of the largest supermarket at the site, recalled that company personnel had been sent to Mexico to become familiar with the ways in which food was displayed and sold in Mexico so to bring the techniques to their stores in the United States. At this store, I observed fresh produce and dry beans and rice sold in large bins resembling the displays of a Mexican mercado, or market (Photo 6). Even the small grocery stores featured relatively wide selections of fresh produce and large bins of dried beans and rice. In contrast, in large mainstream U.S. grocery stores, produce tends to be sold in a smaller area, likely due to the relatively larger quantity sold in cans, jars, frozen, with beans and rice sold in plastic bags or cans set away from the produce section.13

![Photo 6](https://example.com/photo6)

Produce department in a large grocery store designed to be similar to the open air mercados (markets) in Mexico.
Formation of cultural market heuristics. Developing guidelines for appropriate marketer behavior based on cultural distinctions among consumers was a second step in the marketer acculturation process. Knowing how their consumers preferred to be treated were critically important and pervasive skills, yet so subtle to merchants as to appear inconsequential. For example, Miguel Cervantés noted that experience was the most important teacher but was less clear in explaining what it taught him. Because cultural knowledge often is taken for granted (Hall 1973), my task was to make explicit the implicit, eliciting various cues used by marketers in evaluating consumers and developing culturally appropriate marketing behaviors.

Merchants' cultural heuristics were developed on the basis of personal ethnic/racial experiences. Marketers had become particularly attuned to differences between the United States and Mexico by earnings, product availability, and credit, and related these to consumers' cultural custum (e.g., who decides, who buys, and the methods of purchase) and their own appropriate behaviors, such as manner of address, language, and how to build trust and make the sale.

Heuristics were demonstrated in the distinctions used by marketers in code switching between U.S.-Mexican market customs. Bilingual marketing informants noted their need to be able to distinguish when it was appropriate to use Spanish or English, because they frequently moved between English and Spanish in the course of their daily work. Marketers relied on several cues in choosing which language was appropriate. María Hernández used complexion and dress. Bridal store employee Carla Buenaventura argued these were not dependable and instead used the language spoken by the potential customer. This strategy, though effective in avoiding offending customers by using a language they could not speak, did not avail merchants of the opportunity to offer the first words of greeting, which was an important part of showing respect.

Another example is the previously mentioned gender roles. Traditional gender roles, in which the woman decides and the man negotiates and pays, were described by non-Latinos and Latinas alike, including Miguel Cervantes, Yang Su Kim, Ben Bendayan, Sangki Cho, Arthur Zimmerman, Raúl Martinez, and María Hernández. These cultural customs held across product types. Whether it was bridal gowns, fancy dresses, jeans for men, or jewelry, these merchants noted that they sold to the woman in a man and woman pair after acknowledging the man first.

Other and self-awareness and knowledge. For marketers, cultural knowledge was gained referentially, in the form of comparisons and contrasts between the culture of the other and the culture of themselves. As examples, Carla González, María Hernández's sister and business partner, characterized Anglo customers as formal and distant in comparison with the informality and friendliness of their Mexican customers. Lian Ming observed that Mexican women do not bring their man shopping and want her help, whereas Mexican women typically consult their
husbands or boyfriends when buying clothing and did not want assistance.

The benchmark was marketers' expectations of the behaviors of consumers from their own culture. Over time, these expectations were reformulated on the basis of their knowledge of and experience with consumers of other cultures. Through a series of cultural translations, marketers' expectations of their own cultures were transferred from the category of general market characteristics to those specific to their culture. Thus, in displacing the generality of their own culture, marketers made space for other consumers' cultural market customs.

Empathy. Marketers' acculturation was more than an intellectual exercise in comparing cultures, however. Marketers related an emotive understanding of their consumers—that they were away from home, had come here to work and get ahead, had a hard time "outside," and appreciated kindness and respect. Marketers' empathy with their consumers, gained as the result of their interest and identification with them, added a level of rapport beyond mere etiquette. Thus, marketer acculturation involved learning the symbols and customs of other consumer cultures, incorporating them into their own market behaviors, and projecting elements of their own culture back onto that of consumers. In my last interview with Jaime Arroyo, he acknowledged that he had gained a greater sense of his consumers over time, even though he was an immigrant from Mexico himself, stating, "I think they have changed me in the fact that I am more open to them. I am more—it is not like I didn't listen before, but I understand their frustration. I just sit down and listen to them and now I can understand why they are here."

Knowledge of sociocultural relations. Gaining awareness of the larger sociocultural issues affecting their consumers was an important part of marketer acculturation. This was a turbulent time in California; the economy was in a recession, and anti-ethnic and anti-immigrant sentiments were proliferating. An English-only law passed in 1986, and the anti-immigration Proposition 187 passed in 1994.14 Yet, when asked whether "official English" had any effect on their businesses, all merchants, with one exception, responded no. The question triggered a reactionary response by Lily Fuentes: "Why [do] we have to learn [English] and the Americans don't? [I have to learn Spanish]? They also have to communicate. If they want us to learn, the people here should also. The whites aren't even from here. All California belonged to Mexico—actually it's our land." She then launched into a story about an Anglo merchant who owned the store next door but went out of business. He "wouldn't sell to Mexicans" she explained, adding, "It shouldn't matter whether they [the customers] are black or white." Fuentes' vignette relays her understanding of market relations between Anglos and Mexicans in the southwest United States. For those Mexicans and Mexican-Americans who identified strongly as such and were aware that their ancestors had occupied this site and others like it roughly 150 years earlier, it was ironic that merchants went out of business rather than sell to Mexican consumers.

By 1996, retailers reported they had been affected by Proposition 187. Raúl Martínez noted his customers stayed away at first, and he and other businesses responded by placing signs informing people that they did not support the proposition. He explained, "We want to make sure they [consumers] know that if they come here, they are going to be OK—with immigration—with anybody." He added that after several days, at least some of the customers returned, with business back to normal after about a week. Carla González's experience was similar; her jewelry business with sister María Hernández had dropped slower sales but had picked up again shortly thereafter.

None of the six marketers I interviewed on my last visit to the site had ever been raided at the site by the U.S. Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS), despite their knowledge of the predominant presence here of Mexican immigrants. Raúl Martínez noted that the INS had raided his competitor, the largest supermarket in the area and one of the few businesses not participating in the DSBA.15

From 1994 to 1996, several businesses regrouped or diversified. Lily Fuentes had opened a bridal fashion boutique and, with husband David Morales, had added appliances to their jewelry store. Yang Su Kim's discount department store had moved to a new location that was one-third the size of the former store. Other businesses in the area were less fortunate. Worthmore, a discount department store that had never served Mexican consumers enthusiastically, had gone out of business, similar to the Anglo merchant Fuentes described, and been replaced by another discount department store, Precios Bajos. D'Amo Jewelry and Viajes Travel had creatively joined forces with the new store and were located within it. In other changes of ownership, Martínez Fotos had replaced Franco's Fotos, Latino Jewelers replaced El Rey Jewelry, and Las Palmas women's fashion clothing was a bridal and photography shop.

Reflecting on the data, I came to seriously question the old adage that the dollar was colorblind. Ethnicity and nationality gave some retailers advantages over others. However, both Latino and non-Latino businesses failed and succeeded, which suggests that cultural background is inadequate in itself as a marker of success. Cultural orientation can be acquired, and knowledge of social relations is relevant in achieving rapport with consumers. Ultimately, going out of business is the cost of failing to adapt to the changing marketplace.

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14A federal court ruled in December 1995 that states could not deny social services to illegal immigrants, striking down parts of Proposition 187. By spring 1996, plans were underway for Proposition 209, which outlawed affirmative action programs. It passed in November 1996 and went into effect in August 1997 after unsuccessful challenges to its constitutionality. Most recent initiatives have sought to outlaw bilingual education.

15This may partially explain why the parking lot of this larger grocery store was only one-third full when I revisited it in 1996, compared with its overflowing status in the preceding years. In addition, I observed that the store had changed its name from Mercado to Discount Foods and abandoned its open display of produce and other Mexican items, replacing them with the floor-to-ceiling boxes of a warehouse format. Manager Roberto Juárez declined to comment regarding the INS raid.
Strategies of Adaptation

Accommodation refers to the ways in which marketers catered to the specialized needs and wants of their Mexican clientele. Businesses accommodated consumers through (1) product and service assortments, (2) displays, (3) sales support services, (4) holiday celebrations, and (5) community support. First, a fairly wide range of consumer products and services associated with Mexican culture were offered. The fashionable clothing, stylish jewelry, English films dubbed in Spanish, travel services, money orders sent to Mexico, and available foods were starkly reminiscent of Mexico.

Second, promotional displays featuring Mexican cultural signs, such as the Virgin of Guadalupe and the Mexican flag, welcomed consumers. Mexican and U.S. products were displayed apart in some stores and together in others, and at times, both types of displays were used in the same store. Examples of separated products included Mexican music displayed apart from U.S. popular music, Mexican foods stocked apart from other foods, and religious items cordoned off in the jewelry and bridal stores. Displays with the products together included the popular Mexican brand of cookies, Gama, beside its U.S. counterpar, Koehler and Nabisco, in the grocery stores, and Mexican guayabera shirts displayed with men's dress shirts. At times, U.S. and Mexican products were combined in ways more suggestive of spatial efficacy than the logic of country of origin or product type. An example was votive candles stocked between the motor oil and high bulbs.

Combinations of merchandise and services had evolved along categorically inconsistent lines. Examples included banking with travel services, bridal photography and notary public with income tax services (Photo 3), and jewelry with electronic appliances. Although this may reflect culturally distinct categories of products and services, marketers emphasized for their neighbors was also a factor. Marketers noted that they added goods and services as they observed what was selling well in the area. Travel services were especially lucrative and had been added to the check-cashing operation, the bank, and a children's clothing store by 1996.

Third, support services were used to cultivate a cultural decor and generate business. Serving customers well required Spanish language skills, as discussed previously. Next to language, all retailers cited respect as the most important cultural market custom. Yang Su Kim described personal relationships as more important than money. Raúl Martínez noted that customers appreciated respect because they experienced discrimination in other places:

They [Mexican consumers] want to be treated with respect. You know, um, when I say respect I mean, that you know, they are human beings, and even though they don't speak English, they are the ones who are going to pay. I think they are afraid of going to the malls... because nobody speaks their language. And by them not speaking English, they are afraid or they feel inferior talking to other people that people are going to talk down to them or talk to them different. They just want respect. That's all.

Treatting people with respect and honoring them is communicated inherently in Spanish verb and pronoun tenses. According to convention, the formal second-person pronoun, Ud. is used to connote formality and respect, in lieu of the informal tú. I observed marketers using Usted routinely when addressing customers.

Marketeters differed in the financial services they used to accommodate Mexican customers, with a range that included money exchange from pesos to dollars, check cashing, and loans with fees up to 20%. Cashing payroll checks weighed against the risks of doing so but offered merchants greater opportunities to do business. Those accepting the checks were Oscar Hijuelos, María Hernández, David López, José Pérez, Jaime Arroyo, Raúl Martínez, and Lily Fuentes. Most of the jewelry, furniture, clothing, and shoe stores offered weekly payment plans to facilitate sales, and a few of the jewelry stores offered loan services in the form of pawned merchandise in a two-way system of exchange seldom found in mainstream U.S. jewelry retailing.

Fourth, marketers celebrated Mexican national and religious holidays such as Cinco de Mayo, Día de los Muertos, and Easter. The daily festive atmosphere at the marketplace was topped only on these occasions, when the DSBA merchants united, closed the street, and provided music, food, and games. Approximately two-thirds of the participants were Latin@ and one-third were Anglo. Local companies and multinationals, such as the local supermarket, AT&T, Sprint, American Express, and Coca-Cola, sponsored booths. Retailers did not do much business during these times because there was so much going on, but instead viewed it as public relations.

Fifth, marketers contributed to Latino community organizations, fundraisers, and other events on an individual basis and through the two business associations, DSBA and the Korean Merchants Association. María Hernández described her contributions as follows:

I am very, very active in the community. I am constantly giving donations for any large organization when they have their dances or charity sales and benefits. I will always give a gift or something they can raffle off. For example, the Hispanic Chamber of Commerce, for their business mixers, LULAC [League of United Latin American Citizens], wherever they call on me, I am always there... the Latino Bar Association, every Hispanic organization that approaches me, from MANA [Mexican American Women's National Association] to the Latino Bar Association. As long as they are Hispanic... Okay. I also contribute to the Police Department.

In return for their efforts accommodating Mexican customers, marketers garner a premium reward. In the following quote, Raúl Martínez explains this "cultural return" for selling people back their culture:

In this area, if we compare prices of the same items, um, the prices are higher here. Much higher. Twenty percent, 30%, but the big difference is that if they go to the mall or to the department store, uh, there is not a lot of Spanish-speaking employees in those areas. Chances are that you might not get to speak to someone that speaks Spanish. So you cannot ask all the questions. You may have many questions about the items that you want to purchase. For

16Cinco de Mayo (May 5) commemorates the victory of a small band of Mexicans over a larger, better trained branch of the French army in 1862. Día de los Muertos (October 16) marks the celebration of Mexicans of their independence from Spain in 1810.
example, a TV, that nobody can answer, so therefore they are going to come here. They are going to pay a little more, but they are going to get the service that they want.

Accommodation of immigrant consumers has potentially negative effects in addition to the market premium. Jaime Arroyo suggested that, by offering services in Spanish, his business was helping Mexican people stay as they were: "Well, we help them live here, but we don't help them assimilate to the new culture that they are supposed to assimilate. But as long as we keep it behind, they are going to stay behind, and it is going to be harder for them to jump to the middle-class stage. That is what everyone dreams to do."

Assimilation. Arroyo's statements notwithstanding, much evidence was found of marketers actively assimilating their customers. Assimilation refers to marketers' efforts to alter their customers' behaviors to bring them more into line with the U.S. market system. These efforts included making U.S. offerings accessible to their Mexican customers and educating them about U.S. market practices. Mexican cultural offerings were not sufficient in satisfying this clientele's market desires, for these they could find in Mexico and often at lower prices. A substantial part of the appeal of this marketplace was its provision, for a premium price, of aspects of U.S. culture. By providing U.S. products and information on U.S. market customs, marketers helped Mexican consumers adapt to the U.S. capitalistic system.

Marketers taught their Mexican immigrant customers, domesticating them into the disciplinary demands of the U.S. economic system. In addition to providing advice and information on products and services related to U.S. culture, marketers taught them about credit terms, methods of payment, finance charges, and due dates. Marketers even reported giving instructions regarding how to sign their name, because some were accustomed to using an "X," whereas U.S. banks required their full name.

Furthermore, merchants María Hernández and Lilly Fernández, who accepted payroll checks, talked of educating their bankers to do so as part of "business as usual" in this consumer subculture. Marketers who教你 the secondary-party checks correctly perceived their business as a cash business, and they were backed by research. Previous work at this site indicated low rates of bank service usage among Mexican immigrant consumers (Peralta 1994; National Center for Health Statistics 1994). One-third of Hispanics have credit cards, compared with more than two-thirds of non-Hispanic U.S. residents. In addition, 30% of Hispanics and 61% of non-Hispanics have checking accounts (Edmerson 1997).

Negotiate consumers' resistance. Marketers were not always successful in acculturating their Mexican consumers, however, and frequently confronted their resistance. Consumers' cultural resistance was expressed in the form of resistance to pay, pay higher prices, pay sales taxes, or accept credit terms. Consumers persisted in trying to pay with payroll checks, pay less than the stated price, or forgo sales taxes. They attempted to negotiate prices and preferred to pay cash rather than owe money. Ben Bendayan's testimony was indicative: "Ninety percent don't like to pay taxes—especially the Mexican people. With them we [retailers] have to pay the tax. Why? I don't know, but they are not used to paying sales taxes."

Prolonged, repeated resistance of Mexican consumers to U.S. business practices created exasperation for marketers, and many responded reluctantly. Over time, most marketers had changed their offerings and ways of doing business, altered their displays, and incorporated Mexican customs. When it came to cashing payroll checks, paying sales taxes, and negotiating prices, some marketers did so when they would have rather not and others refused outright. Refusing to cash payroll checks were Arthur Zimmerman, Miguel Cervantes, Beatriz Parra, Ben Bendayan, Carla Buenaventura, Sangki Chen, Lian Ming, and Yang Shu Kim. Five years later, clothing retailer Ming had changed her policy and accepted the checks, whereas Oscar Hijuelos had cut his fee and offered free payroll check cashing with a grocery purchase.

All marketers described consumers who refused to pay the sales tax. This refusal typically would be followed by the retailers' attempts to collect it. At this point, the stage was set for either negotiation or refusal. Refusals had negative repercussions in the form of lost sales and repeat business. Ultimately, many of the merchants gave in and absorbed the sales tax, adjusting their prices to include the tax and avoid the confrontation.

Negotiating prices, while similar to refusing to pay sales taxes, was perceived by retailers as a more serious threat to their business. Initially, only a few merchants reported negotiating prices, yet five years later, most did so, albeit reluctantly and on an individual basis. Lian Ming began to negotiate after a trip to Mexico, during which she realized that negotiating prices was a part of Mexican culture. Doing so was significant both culturally and economically. Culturally, the merchants communicated their understanding of Mexican market customs and their willingness to compromise to secure the sales. Economically, customers perceived they had gotten the better deal after negotiating. Given the premium prices charged, negotiations were an important way to keep the business of those who had learned to recognize that the prices were higher, while maintaining the market premium for those who had not.

Acculturation Outcomes

Business acculturation refers to the ways marketers brought their firms into the culture of their consumers. Acculturation outcomes were the result of accommodation and negotiation of consumers' resistance. Marketers displayed ambivalence in adapting to demands put on them by their Mexican clientele to do business as its terms. Taking the risk of cashing payroll checks, knowing at times employers exploited these workers and paid them with bad checks, negotiating prices, and learning another language were all cultural work and eroded their margins. These arduous learning and adaptation activities contrasted with popular views that doing business with another culture was easy, as Raúl Martínez noted:

Many people think you don't have to cater to the Latinos. You just put your products outside and they will come here and buy them. That's not true. You have to cater to them. You have to give service. You have to make sure they are
happy, because if they are not happy, they are not going to come back, you know? And they are willing to pay more, but they expect respect, and they want good service. It’s a challenge. Many people think it is easy, but I think it’s a challenge.

In addition, conflicts with other retailers arose regarding another’s enculturation efforts. Collectively, as individual marketers cultivated their businesses, competition among them reinforced pressures to adapt culturally. One of the Middle Easterners was highly critical of what he regarded as Latinos exploiting other Latinos, taking advantage of the cultural knowledge they possessed, whereas several Latinos were concerned about the increasing number of Korean-owned businesses. Such statements fed misunderstandings and emphasized cultural differences over economic conflicts of interest.

Multicultural reproduction. Overwhelmingly, the appeal of the site was marketers’ provision of Latino’s culture. Marketers honored their Mexican customers, anticipating their market desires and supplying them in ways that felt like home. The many Latino’s consumers browsing through the merchandise, the stands and street vendors, the colorful signs, and the Latin music all contributed to the atmosphere of a Mexican plaza. Through their sidewalk greetings and displays, marketers directly engaged consumers, in contrast to the more passive mainstream market custom of awaiting consumers’ entry into the store.

At the same time, marketers supplied Mexican consumers with the “good life” associated with U.S. culture, the American dream of el norte (the north). It was no wonder Mexican immigrant consumers came to this site; its material abundance was tailored to them, and buying these items was cast as living their dreams. They had come a long way, and consuming jewelry, fashionable clothing, trendy athletic shoes, furniture, and electronic appliances, often with no money down, was an important marker of their success.

Civic development. Marketers mobilized the support of the local city council in more effectively serving their Mexican clientele. Lily Fuentes described the early work of the DSBA in promoting the area through holiday celebrations:

When we [she and David Morales] came here, nobody knew the city councilman; it was going dead here. Then we started a 16th of September [Mexican Independence Day] parade, years ago... There was some conflict. The city had been doing the Silver City Days [a western pioneer festival]. After seeing the 16th celebration, I guess [they] (city officials) were ashamed. Last year, the city estimated 400,000 people came for the 16th of September festival. People came from all over... Cinco de Mayo is another big one.

The initial celebration featured a parade led by Fuentes’s husband David Morales and Raúl Velasco, celebrity host of the popular Mexican variety show, Siempre en Domingo (Always on Sunday). To this day, a photograph of the parade cut from the local paper graces their jewelry store. In it, thousands of Latinos line the street of this marketplace, sending a strong signal of future economic promise to city officials.

Both individually and through business associations, marketers engaged in city politics to resolve cultural conflicts surrounding sidewalk displays and street vendors. Regular meetings between the DSBA and city officials provided a welcome forum to work through the fire department’s prohibition of display tables and racks of merchandise on the sidewalks. Lily Fuentes recalled how, after a few telephone calls, the racks and tables were back outside, where she continued to observe them as recently as spring 1996.

The issue of the vendors was not resolved as easily, despite recognition by marketers and city officials alike of the value of Mexican consumers’ business and the role of the vendors in building it. Even supporters Raúl Martinez, Carla Buenaventura, Yang Su Kim, Lily Fuentes, Sungkil Chen, and Lian Ming were concerned with cleanliness. Those against the street vendors, Jaime Arroyo, Miguel Corvalles, and Ben Bendayan, also were concerned that the vendors took business away from the stores. As of spring 1996, the vendors remained. Noted Lily Fuentes, “The city doesn’t want the vendors, but they make it happy here, selling fruit, ice cream. It feels like home for them [Mexican customers]—if they want to feel at home, they come here. It’s all here—menudo, enchiladas, homemade tortillas, people speaking Spanish.”

Through their organizing and civic activity, merchants developed this marketplace, ending out a place for Mexican consumers. Results were good for the marketers in developing their businesses and good for the city in rejuvenating the area. Largely due to the financial success of the merchants and the continued efforts of the business association, the city funded a multimillion dollar expansion of the area, doubling its size. Businesses in the new area expanded on existing offerings, though there were novel entries as well, including three clothing stores, three bridal shops, two jewelry stores, a restaurant, a theater, an electronics store, a music store, a shoe store, amusement rides for children, and even a cinema. By 1996, a group of the marketers had begun to negotiate a similar development plan with officials of a neighboring city.

Social legitimation. In accommodating their customers’ market needs and wants, marketers validated Mexican people and their culture in the United States. Evidence of this legitimation included the store names (e.g., Mexican, Indio, Latino, Maya), the available products and services, and the alterations to U.S. market customs, including banking practices, negotiated prices, and methods of sales tax assessment.

Market legitimation was particularly significant in the United States as a capitalistic society. The site functioned as a buying refuge, a place where Mexican immigrant and other Latino’s consumers could come to buy or pass time safely. Even so, purchases provided them with an early lesson in the contradictions of the social system: being valued as a consumer even as the larger group of which they were a part was being defrocked in state legislation. In doing business, marketers’ activities were consistent with U.S. values; yet by actively serving Mexican immigrants, some of whom were in the United States illegally, marketers went against the U.S. mainstream’s sense of itself and statewide political initiatives.
The marketer/consumer dialectic. The final outcome of marketer acculturation was the forging of a dialectical relationship between marketers and consumers, such that marketers' and consumers' cultures interpenetrated through the mediating institution of the marketplace (see Figure 3). The three concentric circles reflect the distinct cultural domains of aggregate marketers, aggregate consumers, and the aggregate stores of the marketplace, each domain the result of its own internal, developmental mechanisms, as well as those in relation to the other two.

Cultural learning and adaptation occurred both within and between the orbs, such that culture was enacted in the marketplace collectively by marketers and consumers in the form of their ongoing activities and interactions with each other and within the marketplace itself. In the diagram, the marketplace is a separate domain not reducible to the cultures of aggregate marketers or consumers or their interactions, though each domain plays an important role in the development of the other two. Thus, this diagram brings together the preceding discussion of individual marketer acculturation with previous work on consumer acculturation (Peñaloza 1994) in their relation to the marketplace and to each of the other domains. The distance between the marketplace culture and the cultures of marketers and consumers signifies its relative cultural orientation. In this case, marketplace culture was aligned more closely with consumers’ culture.

At this marketplace site, Mexican, Mexican-American, Cuban, Korean, and Middle Eastern marketers negotiated multicultural imperatives in their daily business activities and interactions with consumers, channel members, competitors, and other marketers. Aggregate marketers' culture was influenced by individual sociodemographics, particularly ethnicity/nationality and social class, together with the collective influences of the cultures of consumers, the marketplace, and larger social relations.

In turn, consumers negotiated cultural imperatives in their daily activities and interactions with family members, friends, coworkers, and marketers across Mexican and U.S. cultural domains. Aggregate consumers' culture was influenced by individual sociodemographics, again particularly ethnicity/nationality and social class, together with the collective influences of their social networks, marketers, the marketplace, and larger social relations.

Marketplace culture was influenced by consumers’ behavior, marketers’ behavior, market imperatives, and larger sociocultural relations. Merchants maintained their own ethnic cultures but oriented their activities toward Mexican consumers because the nature of their business was to serve them and facilitate their market transactions. Thus, Mexican culture dominated in the marketplace as marketers implemented a cultural marketing concept, with U.S. culture also reproduced through marketers’ assimilation activities. Continued immigration from Mexico further reinforced the Mexican cultural orientation of the marketplace.

During the years, this site has exhibited transitory qualities. Historically, it has experienced three major shifts in consumer cultural presence: from (1) Native American, Spanish, and Mexican, from the late 1600s to 1805; to (2) Anglo, from 1865 through the mid-1970s; and back to (3) Mexican by the late 1970s and continuing to the present. Marketers from a range of ethnic groups reproduce Mexican and U.S. culture on a daily basis in their business transactions with Mexican immigrant customers. Festival days mark the symbolic triumph of Mexican culture most visibly, as marketers express gratitude for business consumed during the year. Entertainment events, booths, and banners heighten the reproduction of Mexican culture to the point that well-assimilated Latinos and Anglos join the steady clientele of Mexican immigrants. Thus, the provision of Latino culture at this site was accomplished by marketers in response to the presence of Latino people who, in turn, rejuvenated and sustained it, yielding the particular cultural character of this marketplace.

Discussion and Implications

We need marketers to generate productivity, work, and goods; and we need culture and religion to assure solidarity, identity and social cohesion—and a sense of the human spirit. But most of all, we need democratic institutions capable of preserving our liberty even in parochial communities; and capable of maintaining our equality and our precious differences even in capitalist markets (Barber 1996, p. 300).

As markets across the globe become more multicultural, marketers’ cultural adaptation takes on increasing immediacy and relevance. Adding culture to the marketing concept entails more than merely accommodating culturally distinct
consumers. Such accommodation preserves cultural distinctiveness and autonomy, the loss of which so often is lamented by critics of globalization, such as Barber (1996). In accommodating, marketers cross personal and collective cultural borders, negotiating the competing pulls of multiple cultures as they "unlearn" (Slater and Narver 1995) and relearn various cultural norms, expectations, and behaviors.

This research emphasizes marketers' roles as cultural agents, which remained an implicit refrain of advertising and fashion in McCracken's (1988) work on consumer culture. Marketers have a culture, with values including initiative, consummating exchanges, competing, making money, financial accountability, and a willingness to serve that are evident in their words and deeds. Although influenced by consumers, marketer culture is tempered by its own ethnic and organizational cultures, as well as that of the larger marketplace and market system in the nation in which marketers do business, in this case, the United States. As change agents, marketers pass their cultural values onto consumers through market transactions, helping them assimilate into the U.S. market.

While marketers impose their culture on consumers, they are also malleable to them. Cultural transmission is thus two-way. In accommodating Mexican consumers, responding to their resistance, and incorporating their cultural market customs, marketers were changed by them. Specific values acquired and reinforced as the result of doing business with Mexican consumers included personalized transactions, a family orientation, and a looser sense of transaction timing and terms. Thus, marketers and consumers simultaneously were "the changers and the changed."

The first implication for marketers relates to the mechanics of cultural learning. The marketers in our study spoke Spanish or hired employees who did, provided services mainstream marketers did not, offered products to appeal to Latino/a preferences, celebrated important holidays, and offered community support. Our results extend previous work emphasizing the importance of speaking the language of consumers and providing culturally tailored services (cf. Kaufman and Hernandez 1990; 1991; Kizilbash and Garman 1975–76), by documenting the specific processes, strategies, and outcomes of marketer acculturation.

For marketers, direct contact with consumers is a vital part of their acculturation. However, given the use of cultural stereotypes in demarcating people and fueling prejudice against them, distinguishing among cultures should be done with caution. Although an important part of cultural learning, cultural distinctions and heuristics should be limited to those aspects directly related to market behaviors and exclude a range of relevant behaviors, because seldom are cultural phenomena discrete. A recent example is the joint use of English and Spanish languages in advertising, which accommodates Latino/a's cultural pride while asserting their rightful place in the United States.

The second implication of marketer acculturation relates to the level of the firm. Marketers interviewed over several years attested the success of their firms to their abilities to meet the specific cultural needs of their Mexican clientele. However, cultural costs accrued to them until they had scaled the learning curve of adapting to the Mexican market. On doing so, marketers earned a premium. Furthermore, by adapting to the multicultural marketplace, marketers positioned their firms for the future, transcending existing cultural barriers to entry and success that have restrained less culture-savvy firms. This future positioning, together with immediate financial gains, were the rewards for their efforts.

There are even greater cultural economies of scale to be realized by firms when they have learned to adapt to Latino/a consumers as the result of shared cultural market customs across the Latino diaspora (Corchado and Trejo 1997). Nationally, Latino/as are one of the fastest growing market segments in the United States, currently numbering 30 million people with buying power of $273 billion (Strategy Research 1998). Although impressive, these figures are dwarfed in comparison with the larger Latin American market, which numbers more than a half billion consumers with more than $1.2 trillion in spending power (United Nations 1990).

The third implication relates to the level of the marketplace. Marketers adapted culturally to one another in this study, even as they adapted to consumers. Marketers cooperated with one another and increased the success of the marketplace as a whole, in contrast to previous work emphasizing competitive hostility (Slater and Narver 1994). Marketers experienced some conflict, yet it must be viewed within a larger field of cooperative interactions, in which marketers organized themselves in business associations to attain mutual goals. Together, marketers produced the cultural appeal of the marketplace, promoted their businesses, and worked to address city officials' concerns of economic growth and social policy. In concert and in conflict with one another and with local government, marketers assumed an important role in the community, developing the marketplace and contributing to the production of its culture.

Yet we must go further in understanding the impact of this marketplace. Frenzen and Davis (1990) write of embedded markets. We extend this important concept beyond the marketing instrumentalities of buyer–seller exchanges. This research emphasizes the cultural role of the marketplace as both marketing entity and social space. As a marketing entity, the marketplace exerts its influence on the economic behavior of individual agents; as a social space, it serves as the site for the negotiation of intercultural relationships. Thus, the marketplace is more than the sum of the individual agents, stores, products, and services operating there; it accomplishes more than the maintenance of Latino culture (Kaufman and Hernandez 1991; Kizilbash and Garman 1975–76). This research demonstrates how the marketplace operates as an effective cultural change agent as well, its influence going beyond those of individual marketers and market transactions in simultaneously affecting relations among the various cultural groups of which marketers and consumers are a part.

Finally, this research has directed attention to the complex ways in which marketers and consumers together enact culture in the marketplace. The marketplace is a cultural clearinghouse, the result of a complex juxtaposition of marketers and consumers traversing multiple levels of cultural spheres. Here, Latino/a consumers were brought together in
important, personally gratifying, and socially legitimating ways by marketers of four distinct ethnic cultures: Latino/a, Asian, Middle Eastern, and Anglo. In demonstrating how marketers and consumers together constitute the cultural marketplace through their respective mediations of it, this work provides a theoretical articulation of multiple levels of cultural influences on marketer behavior. Replacing conventions of culturally discontinuous consumers, marketers, and marketplace sites as an empirically based conceptualization of a socioculturally situated and geographically located marketplace site is that the result of the cultural market interactions of marketers and consumers.

Mainstream versus margin cultural dynamics are important factors that affect the form a marketplace eventually will take as the nexus of economic and cultural interests. This marketplace, composed of members of a majority culture—Mexican immigrant consumers and the multicultural marketers serving them—was situated within the larger U.S. mainstream Anglo culture, even as it extended beyond it through international sociocultural networks. Cultural market artifacts—the marketplace, its stores, product and service offerings, and promotions—were mediated imperfectly by marketers using heuristics suggestive of a grid of cultural principles in operation.

Fluid, multiple cultural meanings and associations were invoked strategically by both marketers and consumers who continuously recreated them in tandem and independently within the domain of larger sociocultural relations. Yet, our data demonstrate that market artifacts did not display infi- nitely possible semantic associations determined by companies as they desired, as previously has been suggested (Baudrillard 1988; Debord 1977). Instead, though market meanings and values were somewhat pliable, the cultural associations of stores, products, and services were fairly well grounded in the customs and traditions of the particular consuming communities inhabiting the site, as influenced by their relations with other cultural groups.

Although derived from the specific site under study, Figure 3, which depicts the dialectical relation between marketers and consumers, may be applied to conceptualize other cultural interactions as well. Cultural configurations of other combinations of social class, ethnicity, nationality, race, and gender or sexuality may be exhibited by consumers, marketers, and marketplace sites.

The composition of marketer and consumer cultures and the relations between them are crucial. Multicultural marketers may exhibit the dominant presence of a single cultural group (i.e., blacks, Asians, or Anglos) or combinations of subcultural groups, and their cultural representation may differ across the three domains, as in this study. Intercultural relations can range from enthusiastic acceptance to mere tolerance to overt hostility, with the cultural orientation of the marketplace evident in its respective distance from marketer and consumer cultures.

In this research, consumers’ culture dominated the marketplace, and this would seem most consistent with the marketing concept. However, the global market abounds with consumer-oriented market sites that reflect a cultural orientation distinct from consumers. Examples include tourism, theme parks, musical or theatrical performances, and even restaurants and ethnic grocery stores in which consumers seek to consume a culture apart from their own. Thus, in culturalizing the marketing concept, marketers orient themselves, their activities, and their stores relative to consumers’ cultural desires as well as their actual cultural positioning.

Furthermore, this conceptualization of the market may be extended beyond the retail site to include other aspects of marketing strategies, such as retail stores, distribution channels, advertisements, and products. In each case, the marketing institution or artifact is viewed as a cultural mediator between marketers and consumers. Strategic decisions are made regarding its positioning relative to marketers’ and consumers’ cultures, with attention to larger social relations.

During the years of data collection, the San Pablo marketplace has grown, and its future looks bright with the impending construction of a federal courthouse and the expansion of several of the firms to a neighboring city. Despite the number of challenges facing merchants in the area, all marketers were optimistic about their opportunities and growth prospects in 1991 when this work began, and by 1996, not much had changed that optimism. During my last visit, the steel frame of the courthouse building, the size of a city block, could be viewed. When completed, it will bring thousands of employees who will alter the cultural face of this marketplace again, raising yet another series of questions and issues for further research.

**Conclusions**

In adapting to the multicultural marketplace, marketers accommodate their consumers, assimilate them to mainstream market practices, and respond to their resistance. Acculturation outcomes occur on several levels: the individual marketer, the firm, the marketplace, and larger social relations. This research has focused mainly on the individual marketer’s processes of learning to adapt to consumers of another culture. As the level of the firm, appeals to consumers in products and services, employment practices, pricing, and promotions are important avenues of cultural market adaptation. At the level of the marketplace, the success of the marketers lies in their competition and cooperation with competitors and other marketers.

Marketer acculturation takes place within an arena of social relations. Historical and present relations between the firms and people of the United States and Mexico set the context for marketer acculturation. Marketers actively nurture relationships with their consumers, getting involved with them and aligning with the interests of their communities, which are, at times, in conflict with those of the mainstream. As a result of marketers’ efforts to bring together and serve Mexican consumers, the site has developed into an important part of the Latino/a community.

Many questions remain. Further work is called for on marketer acculturation in relation to other ethnic and national cultural clienteles. In addition, further work is called for regarding processes of marketer acculturation in the distribution channel, between advertising and marketing research agencies and their clienteles, and within the marketing organization. This work is particularly timely because of the current trends of international mergers and alliances.
subcultures, portend tremendous cultural adaptation in the U.S. marketplace for mainstream and minority communities. Of particular interest is how consumers negotiate their identities and market desires across multicultural market offerings and marketplace sites.

Finally, further research is called for in other nations and marketplaces that are defined by cultural dimensions other than ethnicity and nationality, such as social class, gender, and sexual orientation. Although some cultural differences are accommodated in the marketplace, others are not. Research investigating the reasons and factors why and how this is so would contribute to our understanding of the complex cultural nuances of the marketplace as an increasingly fundamental, pervasive, and global site of social life.

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