Hispanic Acculturation: Conceptual And Modeling Issues

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Abstract

The aim of this paper is to clarify conceptual and modeling issues concerning His-
panic acculturation using Berry's (1980) four varieties of acculturation. Although the
bulk of the Hispanic consumer literature assumes the assimilation type of accultura-
tion, most respondents in the study report following the integration route to accultura-
tion (73%). Study findings suggest that Berry's (1980) two acculturation dimensions
appear to be independent of the level of acculturation of the sample except for place
of residency; and that strength of ethnic identity may be a misleading indicator of ac-
culturation, higher acculturation does not always mean weaker ethnic identification.

Introduction

Acculturation is a key variable in understanding ethnic consumer behavior in general and Hispanic consumer behavior in particular (Hernandez & Kaufman, 1991). Studies that have incorporated acculturation as a predictor variable have often found significant differences in the behavior of high-in-acculturation versus low-in- acculturation Hispanics. Significant differences between low-in-acculturation and high-in-acculturation Hispanics have been reported in their shopping orientations (Valencia, 1982); in their attitudes toward grocery shopping (Comer & Nicholls, 1994); in the importance or utility associated to product attributes (Faber et al., 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1986; Kara & Kara, 1996); in their media preferences (Faber et al., 1986); in the media language used or preferred (O'Guinn & Meyer, 1984; Subervi-Velez, 1984; Soruco, 1985); in the effectiveness of advertising language and models (Veltschy & Krampf, 1997);

and in their usage of cents-off coupons (Hernandez & Kaufman, 1991). These studies have contributed to dispel the myth of Hispanics as one homogeneous market. They have established acculturation as a key segmentation variable, perhaps even more important than country of origin in accounting for the observed variance in Hispanic consumer behavior. In spite of its apparent success as a predictor variable in studies of Hispanic consumer behavior, a good amount of confusion surrounds the concept and modeling of acculturation.

The aim of this paper is to clarify conceptual and modeling issues concerning Hispanic acculturation. We will be guided in this effort by Berry's (1980) seminal article on acculturation. In addition, a survey of Hispanics will provide empirical insights into the discussion.

Acculturation Defined

The concept of acculturation originated in anthropology. Berry (1980) reviews the classic

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definitions of the phenomenon within the field of anthropology and identifies three key dimensions of the concept that help to clarify its use. First, the nature of the phenomenon is one requiring **contact** of at least two autonomous cultural groups and subsequent change. Without contact, there is no acculturation. Berry explains that in practice change is often asymmetrical with one group having a greater cultural influence over the other. In the U.S. context, middle-class European Americans constitute the dominant culture, contributing more to the flow of cultural elements to weaker groups; U.S. Hispanics representing an instance of such groups. Second, acculturation can be characterized as a **process** involving three phases: contact, conflict and adaptation. According to Berry, conflict often results because groups do not lightly give up valued features of their culture. Adaptation refers to the change intended to reduce or stabilize conflict. Adaptation can follow a variety of ways one of which is assimilation. Third, acculturation may be studied as a **two-level** phenomenon -- at the group level and at the individual level.

Acculturation has been defined in the marketing literature as the process of learning a culture different from the one in which a person was originally raised (Sturdivant, 1973; Valencia, 1985; Hernandez & Kaufman, 1991). That is, the behaviors and values of the members of the immigrant culture may change as a result of contact with the host dominant culture.

This definition recognizes explicitly the three key dimensions identified by Berry (1980). It acknowledges contact as the central mechanism that precipitates change and adaptation. It sees acculturation as a process, in particular as a learning process. And regarding the level of analysis, it adopts the perspective of the immigrant individual.

Consumer acculturation as Penaloza (1989) suggests is a subset of the more general concept of acculturation. According to Penaloza "the study of consumer acculturation primarily focuses on cultural adaptation as manifest in the marketplace... how immigrants learn consumer skills, knowledge and behaviors that are appropriate within a new consumer culture..." (p. 111).

Models of Acculturation

The confusion that exists in the Hispanic marketing literature is not as much with the definition of acculturation as it is with the modeling of the acculturation process. According to Berry (1980) acculturation as a process can follow a variety of adaptation routes. Berry (1980) identifies four varieties of acculturation in terms of whether or not the group or individual desires to retain his cultural identity and to seek or not a positive relationship with the dominant culture (Figure 1).

The Assimilation Model

The assimilation variety of consumer acculturation corresponds to the melting pot or pres-

Figure 1
Varieties of Acculturation Based on Cultural
Identity and Relationship with Dominant Culture

Types of Acculturation	Retention of Cultural Identity?	Positive Relationship to Dominant Society?
Assimilation	No	Yes
Integration	Yes	Yes
Rejection	Yes	No
Deculturation	No	No

Source : John W. Berry (1980), "Acculturation as Varieties of Adaptation", in *Acculturation: Theories, Models and Some New Findings*. A. M. Padilla (ed). pp 9-25.

sure cooker model of society where the immigrant is either forced or chooses to give up his cultural identity in order to become a member of the dominant culture. Under this type of acculturation the individual incorporates the host dominant culture with little selectivity.

The bulk of the Hispanic consumer literature have implicitly assumed that Hispanics follow the assimilation variety of consumer acculturation (i.e. Valencia, 1985; Comer & Nicholls, 1994; Faber et al., 1987; O'Guinn & Faber, 1986; Faber et al., 1986; Hernandez & Kaufman, 1991; Kara & Kara, 1996; Veltschy & Krampf, 1997). In all these studies researchers have hypothesized that Hispanic consumers that are high-in-acculturation will exhibit behaviors and attitudes that are closer to those displayed by European American consumers as compared to low-in-acculturation Hispanics. This model, also referred as the progressive learning model, assumes that individuals learn the new culture as contact with it increases (Kim, 1977; Kim, 1979; Faber et al., 1987). While such a model has received some support in studies of Hispanic consumers, its use has been implicit, rather than directly tested. No other hypotheses, such as rejection or selective adaptation to aspects of the mainstream consumer culture, has been considered in this literature.

Strength of Ethnic Identity. Hirschman (1981) used the strength of ethnic identity concept in studying the relationship between Jewish ethnicity and cognitive aspects of consumer behavior. This study popularized the use of the strength of ethnic identity measure in subsequent ethnic consumer studies including those involving Hispanic consumers (Wilkes & Valencia, 1983; Donthu & Cherian, 1992; Deshpande, Hoyer & Donthu, 1986; Stayman & Deshpande, 1989). According to Hirschman (1981) strength of ethnic identity may largely determine the level of commitment the individual experiences regarding the norms of the group and, thus, the degree of influence the group has on his/her actions and attitudes (pg.103). Ethnic identity is

often confused with other constructs. A related construct is **enculturation**, the process by which individuals learn about and identify with their ethnic minority culture (Zimmerman, et al., 1996). Ethnic identity is often measured, as opposed to enculturation, as a unidimensional construct (Rotherman & Pinney, 1987). Ethnic identity, cultural affinity and involvement in traditional cultural activities have been found to be important dimensions to enculturation (Zimmerman, et al., 1996)

Ethnic identity can also be considered as a dimension to **acculturation**. Padilla (1980) and Cuellar, Harris and Jasso (1980) have utilized ethnic identity measures in the development of acculturation scales for measuring Hispanic acculturation. The similarity between the strength of ethnic identity concept and one of Berry's dimensions, the individual's desire to retain his cultural identity, is apparent. The problem is that ethnic identity is used as a benchmark for assessing assimilation to the dominant culture (La-Fromboise, Coleman & Gerton, 1993; Zimmerman, et al., 1996). Thus, this construct fails to recognize the varieties of acculturation presented in Figure 1. In the context of the ethnic consumer literature, strength of ethnic identity seems to equate acculturation to assimilation. Often weak ethnic identity is presumed to be an indicator of high assimilation, as contact with the dominant culture increases the individual losses its Hispanic identity. This presumption ignores other acculturation possibilities in Figure 1. First, weak ethnic identity is compatible to deculturation if a negative relationship to the dominant culture is sought. Similarly, strong ethnic identity or the desire to retain one's cultural identity might be compatible with both integration and rejection modes to acculturation. Consequently, ethnic identity fails to recognize the varieties of acculturation described by Berry (1980).

The Integration Model

It is likely that Hispanic consumers and

other ethnic consumers adapt more selectively than the assimilation model suggests. Integration is a form of adaptation that allows immigrants to become an integral part of the dominant culture while retaining their cultural identity. To our knowledge, no research exists on the question of whether or not Hispanics tend to follow this route to acculturation. The existing research indicates that Hispanics want to preserve their ethnic identity (Yankelovich, Skelly & White, 1988; Strategy Research Corporation, 1989). However, these studies have not addressed the question of whether or not Hispanics seek a positive relationship to the dominant culture.

Biculturalism. Biculturalism is a special form of the integration type of acculturation. It assumes: (1) that it is possible for an individual to know and understand two different cultures; (2) that the individual can participate in two different cultures or use two different languages by alternating his/her behavior according to the social context; (3) and that an individual can have a sense of belonging in two cultures without compromising his/her sense of cultural identity (La-Fromboise, Coleman & Gerton 1993). Often, one of the two cultures is the dominant culture. In such case, the individual can then pursue a positive relationship with the dominant culture and still retain his/her ethnic identity.

In the ethnic consumer literature Stayman and Deshpande (1989) has implicitly assumed biculturalism in their study of situational ethnicity and consumer behavior. They found that Chinese, Mexican and Anglo consumers have different perceptions of the appropriate food for consumption in situations where business associates were present versus those were parents were present. This finding seems to illustrate a central aspect of biculturalism: the alternation of the individual's behavior depending on the demands of the social context (Triandis 1980; Ramirez 1984).

Rejection and Deculturation Models

Rejection and deculturation are types of ac-

culturation that do not seek a positive relationship with the dominant culture. Rejection refers to retention of cultural identity while withdrawing or segregating from the dominant culture (Berry 1980). The majority of Hispanics live in barrios (ethnic enclaves) and many Americans believe that Hispanics refuse to integrate to the dominant culture. However, to our knowledge no evidence exists in the Hispanic consumer literature indicating that Hispanics reject the dominant culture.

Deculturation is a path to acculturation where the individual looses its cultural identity and strikes out against the larger society (Berry 1980). Again, to our knowledge, no evidence exists of Hispanic consumers following this route to acculturation.

The absence of evidence of Hispanic consumers pursuing a negative relationship with the dominant culture in the Hispanic consumer literature may be due to the use of the assimilation model as the implicit model to acculturation. In this context, study findings not consistent with the model may have been ignored or reported as non-significant.

Methodology

Sample Selection

The aim of the sampling plan was to design adult and college student samples expected to correspond to two different levels of acculturation. Four samples were selected, two college student samples and two adult samples.

The two adult samples were Hispanic professionals and barrio Hispanics, expected to correspond to high and low levels of acculturation respectively. The two samples were non-probability samples of Hispanic adults living in Mercer County, New Jersey. Thirty Hispanic professionals formed the first sample. Hispanics in this sample were expected to be high in acculturation. High-occupational status has been

found to correlate with high levels of acculturation (Olmedo & Padilla, 1978). The second Hispanic sample was composed of 30 Hispanic adults living in a Hispanic neighborhood (barrio) in Trenton. Barrio Hispanics tend to have a lower level of acculturation than other Hispanics (Sturdivant, 1973; O'Guinn & Faber, 1986).

Two convenience samples of day college students were also selected. A sample of 35 Hispanic students was selected from a private university located in the Suburban Trenton area. Most of them were members of a Hispanic student organization. The second sample, included 50 Puerto Rican students from a private university in Puerto Rico who were enrolled in two business courses. Although the Puerto Rican students are American citizens, they are expected to be lower in acculturation than U.S. Hispanic students because of their lesser contact with the U.S. dominant culture.

The combined size of the samples was 145. The three U.S. Hispanic samples were predominantly Puerto Rican. Forty-nine percent of the Hispanic students, 70% of the Hispanic professionals and 67% of the barrio Hispanics were of Puerto Rican origin or ancestry.

Measures

A scale based on interpersonal contact was developed as a measure of acculturation. It included 5 variables: the proportion of Hispanic families living in the respondent's neighborhood, the proportion of coworkers that are Hispanic, the proportion of close friends that are Hispanic, whether or not the respondent is married to or dates a Hispanic, and the number of years study in the U.S.The internal reliability of this scale seems adequate with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.76. This scale correlates positively ($r = .75$, sig. < .01) with the two levels of acculturation represented by barrio Hispanics (low) and Hispanic professionals (high), supporting our contention that these two samples are expected to correspond to low and high acculturation respec-

tively. We were unable to estimate the correlation between the interpersonal contact scale and the levels of acculturation represented by the two student samples since no interpersonal contact measures were made of the Puerto Rican students from the private university in Puerto Rico.

Strength of ethnic identity was measured by two questions. First, Hispanic respondents were asked to reveal their ethnic identity after providing them with a list of alternatives in terms of country of origin or ancestry: "Do you consider yourself (ethnicity)?". Then, they were asked to express their level of agreement/disagreement, on a five-point scale, with the following statement: "I feel that I am very (ethnicity)".

Berry's (1980) four varieties of acculturation were measured by two dichotomous (yes or no) questions: "Is Hispanic culture worth preserving in your personal life?"; and "Should Hispanics become an integral part of American society?". An affirmative answer to both questions indicate the integration route; two negative answers indicate deculturation; a yes answer to the first question and a no answer to the latter one indicates rejection; and a no answer to the first question but affirmative to the second one indicates assimilation. In addition, Hispanic respondents were asked whether or not they thought Hispanics should segregate from the rest of American society.

Data Collection

The questionnaires were administered in both English and Spanish according to respondents' language preferences. The method of backtranslation was used to ensure equivalence. Both versions of the questionnaire were pretested and potential difficulties were identified and adjusted. The survey of college students was self-administered. The group of Hispanic professionals was interviewed over the phone. Barrio Hispanics were interviewed in person since a telephone survey would have excluded a significant portion of the barrio population (Hernandez & Kaufman, 1990).

Analysis and Findings

Strength of Ethnic Identity

The combined mean score on strength of ethnic identity for the 4 Hispanic samples was 4.54 on a five-point scale (between "strong" and "very strong"), with 5 being "very strong". Hispanics in the various samples tended to exhibit strong ethnic identity.

The contact measure of acculturation was found to be negatively correlated to strength of ethnic identity ($r=-.38$, $p<.01$). The results of a one-tail t-test for independent samples indicates that barrio Hispanics (mean $= 4.7$) are higher in their strength of ethnic identity than Hispanic professionals (mean $=4.2$) ($p<.01$). However, the results of a second t-test indicates that no significant difference exists between Puerto Rican students (mean $= 4.6$) and Hispanic students (mean $= 4.7$) in their strength of ethnic identity. The above findings suggest that although strength of ethnic identity appears to be negatively correlated to level of acculturation it could also be compatible with low and high levels of acculturation, as indicated by the non-significant

results of the second t-test. They also suggest that, on an absolute level, strength of ethnic identity is high, even for the high acculturation groups.

Integration

The results of the survey suggest that the vast majority of Hispanics prefer the integration variety of acculturation. Ninety-nine percent of all Hispanics indicate that Hispanic culture is worth preserving in their personal lives while 74% want Hispanics to become an integral part of American society. The latter figure is 90% for U.S. Hispanics, when the sample of Puerto Rican students is excluded. Island Puerto Ricans as expected tend to hold more nationalistic attitudes.

The classification of respondents by varieties of acculturation in Table 1 reveals that 73% follow the integration route, 26% the rejection variety of acculturation, only 1% follows assimilation and 0% deculturation. When the Puerto Rican students are excluded from the sample in Table 1, a higher proportion of respondents indicate a preference for integration (88%) and a

Table 1
Hispanic Respondents by Varieties of Acculturation

Should Hispanics Become an Integral Part of American Society?	Is Hispanic Culture Worth Preserving?	
	yes (percent)	no (percent)
	<u>Integration</u>	<u>Assimilation</u>
yes (percent)	100 (73%) (all Rs)	1 (1%) (all Rs)
	80 (88%) (all Rs except Rican students)	0 (0%) (all Rs except Puerto Puerto Rican students)
	27 (93%) (barrio Hispanics)	0 (0%) (barrio Hispanics)
	<u>Rejection</u>	<u>Deculturation</u>
no (percent)	36 (26%) (all Rs)	0 (0%) (all Rs)
	11 (12%) (all Rs except Puerto Rican students)	
	2 (7%) (barrio Hispanics)	

lower proportion indicates a preference for rejection (12%) as paths to acculturation.

Table 1 also reveals that most barrio Hispanics (93%) prefer the integration route to acculturation while only 7% prefer the rejection route. The popular view that Hispanics living in ethnic enclaves reject the dominant culture is not supported by the data.

The results of contingency table analyses in Table 2 indicate that respondents desire to preserve Hispanic culture is independent from their level of acculturation as measured by the contact scale or by the expected level of acculturation corresponding to each U. S. Hispanic sample.

Contingency table analyses also reveal that

barrio Hispanics and Hispanic professionals do not differ significantly on how likely they are to favor becoming an integral part of American society or consider Hispanic culture worth preserving. Only when acculturation level is considered in terms of the place of residency, U.S. Hispanic students are more likely to respond that Hispanics should become an integral part of American Society than Puerto Rican students (chi-square = 20, p < .01). Island college students are more likely than U.S. Hispanic students to desire segregation from American society (Fisher's Exact Test p < .01). Only 7% of all respondents believe that Hispanics should segregate themselves from the rest of American society. This proportion decreases to 1% for U.S. Hispanics when the Puerto Rican sample is excluded.

Table 2

Contingency Table Analyses: Responses to Cultural Dimensions by Level of Acculturation

Responses to Cultural Dimensions	Level of Acculturation	Chi-Square	Significance	n
Hispanic Culture Worth Preserving	Contact Scale[1]	____[2]	____[2]	70
Hispanic Culture Worth Preserving	U.S. Hispanic Students = high Puerto Rican Students = low	1.4	.23	83
Hispanic Culture Worth Preserving	Hispanic Professionals = high Barrio Hispanics = low	____[2]	____[2]	59
Hispanics Should Become an Integral Part of U.S. Society	Contact Scale[1]	1.4	.23	70
Hispanics Should Become an Integral Part of U.S. Society	U.S. Hispanic Students = high Puerto Rican Students = low	17.9	.00	80
Hispanics Should Become an Integral Part of U.S. Society	Hispanic Professionals = high Barrio Hispanics = low	2.47	.12	59
Hispanics Should Segregate from U.S. Society	Contact Scale[1]	____[2]	____[2]	70
Hispanics Should Segregate from U.S. Society	U.S. Hispanic Students = high Puerto Rican Students = low	7.3	.01	79
Hispanics Should Segregate from U.S. Society	Hispanic Professionals = high Barrio Hispanics = low	.95	.33	60

[1] The contact scale was estimated for barrio Hispanics, Hispanic professionals and Hispanic students only. The median contact score was used to divide the respondents into low and high in acculturation groups.

[2] Statistics could not be estimated since all respondents wanted Hispanics to be an integral part of U.S. society or all stated that Hispanic culture is worth preserving or all opposed Hispanics segregation from U.S. Society.

Discussion

The vast majority of Hispanics participating in the study followed the integration route to acculturation. The majority of Hispanic respondents want to preserve Hispanic culture in their personal lives and to become an integral part of American society. Surprisingly, only one respondent in the sample seemed to follow the assimilation route to acculturation. On the other hand, a significant minority of respondents seemed to opt for the rejection route to acculturation. The popular view that Hispanics living in ethnic enclaves reject the dominant culture is not supported by the data. Most barrio Hispanics in the sample reported preferring the integration route to acculturation (93%).

It appears that Berry's (1980) two acculturation dimensions are independent of the level of acculturation of the Hispanic sample. This is to be expected since these dimensions define routes to acculturation not the progress achieved by the individual in the acculturation process. However, place of residency of the sample is not independent of the desire that Hispanics become an integral part of American society. It is plausible that some Puerto Rican students may have interpreted an affirmative answer to the question "Should Hispanics become an integral part of American society?" as support for the Island's statehood. The most recent plebiscite conducted on the political status of Puerto Rico indicates that more than half of those voting do not support statehood. The frequent use of strength of ethnic identity as a proxy measure of acculturation is due in large part to the implicit use of the assimilation model as the model of acculturation in ethnic consumer studies including studies involving Hispanic consumers. The results of the data analyses suggest that strength of ethnic identity could be a misleading indicator of acculturation; higher acculturation does not always mean weaker ethnic identification. Although, U.S. Hispanic students are higher in acculturation than Puerto Rican students, their strength of ethnic identity is not significantly different from that exhibited by their island counterparts.

Consumer researchers need to pay more attention to the use of the integration and rejection models of acculturation in future studies of Hispanic consumer behavior. It appears that consumer researchers may have overstated the importance of the assimilation model of acculturation in the study of Hispanic consumers.

Suggestions for Future Research

Future research should extend the generalizability of this study's findings by overcoming the following key limitations. First, the use of convenience samples that are predominantly Puerto Rican in origin or ancestry limits this study's external validity. Probability sampling that includes the main country of origin or ancestry groups (Mexicans, Central Americans, and Cubans) should be pursued. Second, larger sample size will allow for controlling the impact of the level of acculturation and the country of origin or ancestry on Berry's (1980) four varieties of acculturation. Third, the use in this study of only one indicator for each of the two acculturation dimensions employed by Berry (1980) prevents an estimate of the reliability of the measures. The use of multiple indicators to measure the two dimensions is recommended on future research on this topic. Fourth, the measures for Berry's acculturation dimensions should be multichotomous not dichotomous in order for them to capture a larger amount of the possible variation in responses. For instance, although ninety-nine percent of all respondents indicate that Hispanic culture is worth preserving in their personal lives, we are unable to determine, given the yes/no form of the question, the degree to which respondents adhere to this statement.

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