

**How to Reach  
Chicago's  
Mexican Market:**  
A Case Study  
of Local Businesses  
Doing it Right



## **An Introduction to Olga Camargo**

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Olga Camargo is a second-generation Mexican immigrant and a U.S. born citizen. Her parents, in search of realizing the American Dream like many others before them, immigrated to Chicago in the 1970s and settled in Little Village where Olga grew up speaking English as her second language. Through acculturation, Olga not only realized how to work within the U.S. economy, she figured out how to leverage the financial system, gain an education, and become a major contributor to both the economy and society. Olga received her bachelor's degree in marketing from the University of Illinois at Chicago and most recently completed her master's degree in English at the same institution—achieving her goal of overcoming the obstacles that she faced speaking more Spanish than English as a child. Today, she acts as my editor, my research colleague and my muse. Olga was recently promoted to head of hispanic research and strategy at Mesirow Financial. This report represents just one in a series of actions Olga has undertaken to better wed the broader Chicago business community with its Mexican community counterpart. She has a unique and well-informed perspective of not only how to succeed in business, but how to help businesses succeed among the rapidly growing affluent class of Mexican-Americans.

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Olga Camargo



When Joel, an immigrant from Guanajuato, Mexico, arrived at Chicago's Little Village in 1995, his goals were to find a job, send money back to his country, and one day return home. Upon arriving at Little Village, Joel moved in with his brother's family, which had lived in the community since 1977. His family provided him with leads to jobs and information on how he could accomplish other economic goals. Soon after Joel obtained a job as a mechanic with a mainstream maintenance services company, he realized that he needed to learn English to more effectively communicate with his boss and coworkers. Joel was serious about learning the second language and even purchased English-language cassettes, video tapes, and a few dictionaries. He also made it a habit to watch English-only television programs and frequently asked English speakers to clear up his confusions about the language.

Joel knew that his Spanish language would permit him to easily accomplish many business activities in Little Village; however, he also knew that speaking English outside the area would be indispensable to carry out these same transactions. The community's ubiquitous ambience, which embraced both Mexican culture and Spanish language, allowed Joel to shop in Little Village's family-owned businesses and carry out financial transactions at his bank. For Joel, Little Village was a place where he could participate in the economy to build his wealth; and where he could express himself in Spanish and celebrate his culture (e.g., attending mass and observing Mexican holidays).

While Joel remained committed to his culture and original goals, his constant interaction with mainstream society (e.g., coworkers), and other long-established family members in his community influenced his decision to buy a home in Little Village to partake in the American Dream. As time progressed, Joel began acculturating to additional mainstream values and practices like using credit cards and making more use of Second Federal Savings bank to realize more economic opportunities. Conversely, marketers at Second Federal Savings recognized that acculturated Mexicans<sup>1</sup> like Joel view the world in a non-traditional way and believe in achieving success without sacrificing their cultural identity, meaning that standard marketing strategies would fail (Denise, Ogden, and Shau) and new techniques would be required.

As this essay points out, traditional marketing strategies used by (new) mainstream businesses in Little Village are inept at reaching the Mexican market because they have not been designed with the (ethnic) consumer in mind. Acculturated Mexicans like Joel do not respond well to mainstream marketing tactics because they are not fully assimilated. They are a different kind of consumer with a different set of needs and wants, who place family at the center of everything they do and require—this hybrid consumer calls for special marketing strategies in order to be reached. In contrast to those businesses mentioned above, some Little Village business owners have long known about the special marketing strategies that are required to engage their Mexican customers, which include: a family-oriented approach; Mexican-style décor throughout stores; Spanish music in the background; relationship building with the customer; and, ethnic products. As I will show in this essay, marketing strategies used in the Mexican community stem from Little Village's established acculturation model, which, in turn, incorporates Mexicans' culture and their economic goals into business practices, allowing marketers to more effectively reach their target market. In order to use the model,

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<sup>1</sup> Mexicans refers to documented and undocumented immigrants.

mainstream business marketers need to begin developing an understanding of the (evolving) Mexican culture, especially because acculturated Mexicans, a segment or microculture (Denise, Ogden, and Shau) of the broader Mexican ethnic subgroup, which is growing fast in numbers, per the Pew Hispanic Center, suggests their increasing buying power and emerging economic opportunities (e.g., special mortgage market and remittance business) for businesses like financial institutions.

The problem is that these economic opportunities are being forfeited because new mainstream businesses, primarily banks, in Little Village, are not proactively moving to meet Mexicans half way in their effort to realize economic goals as they do not understand that Mexicans like Joel are acculturating and not fully assimilating. This missing knowledge handicaps a company's ability to create a business model that considers both the company's and Mexican customers' views, which, in turn, impairs their ability to devise appropriate marketing strategies and participation in (some Hispanic-dependent) growing markets. A 2005 article, entitled "Remittance Business Grows, Banks' Share of it is Still Small," in the *Northwestern Financial Review*, states that a report by the Federal Reserve found that remittances for Mexicans increased to 16 percent in 2000, up from 4 percent in 1994, but that banks have remained largely at a competitive disadvantage in this market.

The report also revealed that limited hours of operation, account relationships, and an inability to bridge language and cultural differences were all reasons why banks have not been able to realize more success in the remittance business. The remittance business is just one example of the many economic opportunities that immigrants in Little Village have created for banks. Banks, however, will be unable to reap the benefits of these economic opportunities unless they gain insight into the U.S. Mexican culture to understand hybrid consumers like Joel who are bicultural.

In essence, Joel's story shows that when he first arrived to Chicago his goals were limited to making money and remitting it back to Mexico. His original plan did not include goals such as learning English, buying a home, or using a financial institution and credit cards. These goals came into being after his increased interaction with U.S. society and when he learned about the financial opportunities available at Second Federal Savings. Today, Joel states that he has two goals to achieve: he wants to become a U.S. citizen; and, still plans to one day return to Mexico, where he is currently having his retirement home built.

What is important for new mainstream financial institutions to understand is that Joel's experience is not unique. Little Village is full of Mexican immigrants, like Joel, who can tell a similar story of how they managed to adopt U.S. values to help them realize their goals, while preserving their cultural identity. It is however, up to financial institutions' marketers to begin learning more about Mexican immigrants' demographic shifts, in order to develop knowledge about their increasing size, buying power, and preferences (e.g., acculturation). This knowledge will allow marketers to more effectively deploy required resources (e.g., bi-cultural workers and capital) in order to better meet the needs and wants of this market (Denise, Ogden, and Shau). The remainder of this paper seeks to show how Mexicans' preference for acculturation, coupled with the more ethnic-oriented marketing activities in Little Village, undermines traditional marketing techniques, which have been devised to attract assimilated consumers, not acculturated ones.

### **Assimilation: More than a Loss of Cultural Identity**

When Mexican immigrants first began immigrating to this country after 1848<sup>2</sup>, they were expected to give up their cultural identity and fully assimilate to American values. Indeed, there was no question that Mexican children would learn to speak English and adopt the mainstream culture. Today, however, Mexican immigrants

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<sup>2</sup> In 1848, the U.S.-Mexican War ended with the signing of the Treaty of Guadalupe Hidalgo, which resulted in Mexico losing about 55% of its territory to the U.S. (what is today, Texas, California, Nevada, Utah, Colorado, Arizona, New Mexico, and Wyoming). Mexico's loss of territory also created a new international border.

do not necessarily believe that they must completely assimilate in order to participate in the economy or to achieve social opportunities. In fact, an article in *Hispanic Business Magazine* entitled “Bicultural Bias,” reports on research findings regarding Hispanics and their preference to retain their cultural identity, while adopting complementary skills from the mainstream culture as an alternative to assimilation (Magana). Many Hispanics, in particular Mexicans, believe that total assimilation leads to a loss of their original cultural identity, and that loss is more damaging than any gains it may bring.

Mexicans are concerned with losing their culture and have even expressed this concern in some migration corridos (Mexican songs), like *Jaula de Oro* or “cage made of gold” by Mexican group Los Tigres del Norte (Serrano 14). Los Tigres del Norte have achieved so much popularity with their songs, which touch on immigrants’ U.S. experience, that a section of 26th Street (in the heart of Little Village) has been named in their honor—all of which suggests Mexicans’ great identification with the songs. Los Tigres del Norte’s *Jaula de Oro* depicts the story of a first-generation Mexican man who immigrated to the U.S. with his wife, when his children were small. Despite having lived in this country for ten years, he has not managed to become a legal citizen and has grown estranged from his children, who have fully assimilated into the mainstream culture and deny their Mexican heritage, or affiliation to traditional Mexican values.

When he realizes that he is consumed by work, and that he lives in constant fear of being deported, he asks his children if they would like to go back to Mexico. His children respond in English that they do not want to return to Mexico, and this, along with his nostalgia for his home in Mexico, disconcerts him. He sees his children’s assimilation as detrimental to their culture and their relationship. The loss of cultural identity and estrangement suffered by families as a result of complete assimilation, however, are not just limited to first-generation Mexican immigrant families who are looking to preserve their culture.

In his autobiographical work, *Hunger of Memory: The Education of Richard Rodriguez*, the Mexican-American author Richard Rodriguez—born in San Francisco, California in 1944—writes about his assimilation experience in the U.S. and how it managed to alienate him from his family and culture. Although Rodriguez’s experience is a counter-example to the current push for acculturation, it helps crystallize the kind of emotional suffering that individuals like Rodriguez undergo when they assimilate. Unlike the children in the Mexican corrido *Jaula de Oro*, who assimilate on their own, Rodriguez’s parents push him to do so when they decide to only speak English at home, even though they are not proficient. Rodriguez’s parents believed that if their children learned English it would give them a better chance at success in this country, what they did not suspect was that their persistent efforts would eventually put Rodriguez on track toward full assimilation.

Although Rodriguez’s assimilation did help him achieve professional status as a professor at Stanford University, in the long-run, it also stripped him of his cultural identity. The loss of cultural identity caused him emotional distress, loneliness, and also managed to estrange him from his parents, who had remained faithful to their culture. Even though Rodriguez’s parents wanted success for their children and supported their assimilation, the entire family paid a high price when Rodriguez could no longer relate to them. Interestingly, Rodriguez says that his assimilation, which began in 1950, was necessary to become a productive member of society, which coincides with the pre-1960 era, when American companies’ marketing efforts largely ignored ethnic groups (Denise, Ogden, Shau), which reflected dominant society’s sentiment towards minorities and its intolerance for any cultural difference. Today’s society, however, has taken on a more accepting attitude toward cultural differences as suggested by some American companies marketing strategies (e.g., Sears and Wal-Mart), which has helped support Mexicans’ acculturation process.

### **Acculturation: Mexicans’ Preferred Model for Achieving Goals**

Acculturation is the key for Mexicans because it allows them to maintain their cultural identities and enables them to successfully participate in society. Scholars have found that the term assimilation overstates the extreme

measure that minority groups need to assume in order to succeed within the dominant culture. These scholars have distinguished the differences between assimilation and acculturation, which is important to understand if, for example, a financial institution wants to effectively advertise to the Mexican market as it will have implications for the kinds of marketing techniques that should be used.

Keefe and Padilla (1987) define assimilation as social, economic, and political integration into the host culture and state that research has shown that complete adoption of a host society is not always absolute, which suggests a lack of total conviction. Gordon (1964) explains assimilation as a series of steps that need to be passed before completely achieving it. This supports the view that even if we see minorities participating in activities that are typical of the dominant culture we cannot assume that the group is fully assimilating.

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Furthering Gordon's argument are Yinger, Shaull and Grammann, who argue that the completion of assimilation levels vary in degrees of success and rate, which is dependent on whether or not individuals feel safe with the mainstream values, upholding the notion that minority individuals prefer to transition in and out of the dominant culture instead of completely adopting it, unless they see it as totally safe to assume (Shaull & Gramann).

Moreover, Moore (1976) was among the first sociologists to argue that the assimilation experience of Mexican-Americans does not fall into the traditional pattern like that of other Hispanic and non-Hispanic groups (Shaull & Gramann). He noticed that Mexicans have not fully assumed the national identity like other immigrant groups, despite having been in this nation for over 150 years (since the end of the U.S.-Mexican War in 1848). Like Moore, Keefe and Padilla reached the same conclusion regarding Mexicans' experience in the U.S. Keefe and Padilla,

however, took this finding a step further and introduced the term that best describes what Mexicans are trying to accomplish when they participate in mainstream society.

Keefe and Padilla argue that Mexicans are not assimilating, but are selectively acculturating to the mainstream culture. That is, Mexicans like Joel are acculturating to those qualities from the mainstream culture such as language, which enables them to advance socially and economically, while allowing them to keep their core cultural traits like family structure, traditional foods, and music preferences. Research has shown that acculturated Mexicans and their assimilated counterparts rate similarly on economic achievement (Magana). For example, unlike Richard Rodriguez who fully assimilated to mainstream culture, Mexican-American author Sandra Cisneros' (born in Chicago in 1954) rejected full assimilation and used acculturation as a vehicle to achieve economic success. Cisneros' personal experience and works clearly show how her acculturation to the English language, among other things, permitted her to participate in mainstream society, without completely assimilating.

In 1976, Cisneros graduated from Loyola University of Chicago with a bachelor's degree in English, two years later she received a master's degree in creative writing from the University of Iowa. Even though Cisneros had been taught to write in a mainstream fashion, she was uncomfortable with adopting this style as her own. Once Cisneros found her voice, she authored several books, among them her most widely read (included in college literature courses) *The House on Mango Street* (1984), a series of vignettes depicting the life of a Mexican American-girl coming of age in Chicago, who is searching for self-identity, independence, and cultural acceptance. *The House on Mango Street*, like many of her other works, was inspired by Cisneros' own personal experiences such as her constant trips to Mexico during her childhood years, and her ethnic and cultural background—all of which reflects her commitment to the Mexican culture, despite her participation in mainstream schools where she had the opportunity to fully assimilate. Cisneros' experience and

accomplishments clearly show how she was able to participate in society and achieve success through acculturation.

Successful business owner Eduardo Castaneda, founder of Lalo's Mexican Restaurant is another Chicagoan who has benefited from acculturation, without full assimilation. Castaneda immigrated to the U.S. in 1968. Three years later, he took a loan and opened Lalo's Mexican Restaurant in Little Village. When the restaurant grew in popularity, it gained more customers and a second restaurant was opened, just a few blocks away. For nine years, Lalo's Mexican Restaurant solely operated from those two sites. Today, there are 12 restaurants throughout the city, including one in Chicago's downtown. Although Castaneda has been approached with several franchise opportunities, the restaurant remains family-operated and continues to serve the same original recipes that it did when it first started. Moreover, the Mexican restaurant continues to maintain much of its cultural flair, despite operating outside of Little Village alongside other mainstream businesses.

Castaneda's experience shows that his decision to acculturate to specific mainstream practices, like taking a bank loan and catering to larger society, put him on track for new economic opportunities. His decision to acculturate increased his participation in the mainstream market, while permitting him to keep his cultural values. According to Shaull, these acculturation choices are possible when there are established Mexican communities (e.g., Little Village) and persistent waves of first generation Mexicans immigrating to the U.S. For Castaneda, Little Village served as a spring board because it gave him the opportunity to fulfill a need (i.e., a more extensive Mexican menu, past tacos and burritos) and realize economic goals in his community, and this self-empowerment encouraged him to pursue success beyond the area, while staying true to his culture.

Cisneros' and Castaneda's experiences show that they were able to obtain economic success through acculturation, without full assimilation. "A 1998 McKinsey analysis of Census and Simmons Market Research data projected the proportion of acculturated Hispanics to grow from 57 percent in 1995 to 67 percent by 2010" (Magana). What is interesting about this trend is that acculturation or retention of cultural identity is dominant among second-generation Hispanics. Moreover, there is a misconception that Hispanics who keep their cultural identity are prevented from progressing, which is dispelled by a 2003 study by RAND Corp. by economist James P. Smith, who found that successive generations of acculturated Hispanic men have shown significant improvements in salary and education relative to native-born Anglos (Magana). The growing segment of acculturated Hispanics suggests to marketers that they will need to revamp their marketing strategies in order to reach the Mexican market (e.g., banks will need to hire bicultural Hispanics at all management levels to serve the market efficiently).

### **A Thriving Little Village with a Burgeoning Economy**

Since the 1970s, Chicago's Little Village (also known as South Lawndale) community has served as a port of entry to many Mexican immigrants, like Joel and Castaneda. With the continuous influxes of immigrants across the years, this Midwest community now has the third largest population of Mexicans in the nation, which translates into major potential business for many companies. An article in Crain's Chicago Business, reports that over 43.5 million Hispanics make up an estimated 15% of the U.S. population and are growing five times faster than the general population. What is noteworthy is what an analysis by the U.S. Department of Commerce's Census Bureau found that Mexicans comprise close to 59% of the nation's overall Hispanic population, depicting the group's dominance and suggesting their increasing level of buying power. At a local level, the total number of Mexicans living in metropolitan Chicago is estimated at 1.1 million (Chapla).

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Many Mexicans in metropolitan Chicago are attracted to Little Village, specifically to 26th Street, its chief commercial strip, as it offers many ethnic products and tailored services that meet their unique needs, but more importantly because as many of these immigrants put it “it’s like Mexico,” referring to the community’s cultural ambience. The commercial strip is characterized by Spanish and English signage in storefronts; Spanish music pouring out of businesses and onto the streets; gridlock traffic and crowded sidewalks, especially on weekends; and, street vendors selling Mexican ice cream and corn on a stick—all typical traits of a traditional Mexican market. Moreover, the Little Village commercial strip is filled with family-owned shops, some dating back to the early 1970s. In recent years, the business corridor has managed to attract mainstream chains, like Footlocker and Verizon, which moved into the area in quest of gaining market share.

According to the Little Village Chamber of Commerce (LVCC), there are some 1,000 businesses in the community, all of which market to Mexicans with a mix of ethnic products including: spices; tortillas; boots and hats; Spanish music; furniture; pottery; and much more. Because many cultural goods can only be obtained in Little Village, Mexicans from other areas of the city and region come here (Halperin). Mexicans residing in out-of-state locations (e.g., Detroit, Michigan and Lorain, Ohio) have been known to invest up to ten hours

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of driving time on weekends just to be able to shop on 26th Street. Mexicans’ loyalty to Little Village’s corridor of businesses has resulted in high sales for merchants, which are estimated at \$900 million a year, according to a report by the Little Village Community Development Corporation entitled, “Little Village: Capital of the Mexican Midwest.” The prosperous business strip is said to be generating a sales tax revenue that is second only to Michigan Avenue.

Little Village’s burgeoning economy has not gone unnoticed. Many mainstream businesses like financial institutions have made their way into the community to increase their market share. Financial institutions, in particular, have flooded 26th Street, and in the last couple of years, Bank of America and Fifth Third Bank, have also joined the mini-financial district in Little Village. In the 1970s, the community only had a couple of financial institutions. Today, there are about a dozen, which include the three largest banks in the nation. These banks moved into Little Village after learning of the economic opportunities in the community. Indeed, in 2004, Federal Reserve Bank of Dallas reported that Mexicans across the nation have created a \$13.3 billion remittance business (Coronado 2004). In that same year, Second Federal Savings’ CEO, Mark Doyle, reported his bank’s participation in the booming \$3.9 billion dollar ITIN<sup>3</sup> mortgage market, comprised of 47 top Chicagoland areas, which include communities like Little Village. Both remittance business and ITIN mortgage market, among other emerging markets in Little Village, have swayed mainstream businesses, banks among these, into the community; however, they have not managed to successfully compete in the new markets because of their inept marketing strategies.

Although the recent flood of mainstream businesses into the community has taken away some Mexican cultural flair from storefronts, Little Village maintains a strong hold on its culture, which is notable in street

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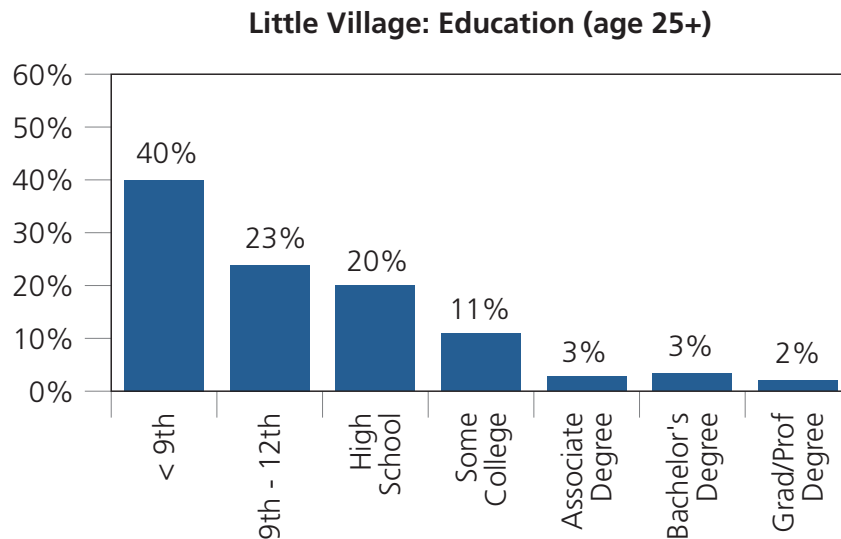
<sup>3</sup> Individual Taxpayer Identification Number (ITIN) is a special nine-digit number that begins with a “9” issued by the Internal Revenue Service to taxpayers, regardless of immigration status, who do not qualify for a Social Security Number. The number can be used to open an interest-bearing account; pay taxes; and, buy a home. About 67% of banks in Chicago accept ITINs (Doyle).

murals and church activities (not just limited to Sundays). Moreover, the community comes together to hold its yearly celebrations in December for their patron saint, the Virgin de Guadalupe, venerated by Mexicans; and, traditional posadas during the holiday season, which are celebrated for eight consecutive days. The Mexican culture is most alive at the annually celebrated Mexican Independence Parade, which runs through 26th Street and draws over 1 million people (includes television viewers). The floats in the parade are filled with Mariachi bands and Mexican flags, while charros (Mexican cowboys) riding horses perform tricks on the street. Some marketers (at mainstream businesses), who are also chamber members, have been using the televised Mexican Independence Parade, one of the largest in the nation, as a marketing technique to show their support of the Mexican culture and, of course, to gain exposure within this market. The parade, however, is used for more than marketing products and services. Non-profit agencies like Instituto Del Progreso Latino use the parade to do more than just support the Mexican culture, their presence at the event promotes acculturation to achieve economic and social success.

**Instituto Del Progreso Latino: Promoting Acculturation for Full Participation in Society**

Instituto Del Progreso Latino (IDPL) is an agency that assists Latinos with acculturation into the appropriate educational and training systems for personal and economic growth, without fully assimilating into the mainstream culture. Its mission is “...to contribute to the fullest development of Latino immigrants and their families through education, training and employment that fosters full participation in the changing United States society while preserving cultural identity and dignity” (IDPL). One of their main efforts is geared to raising educational levels—a tough battle as depicted by the 2000 U.S. Census demographics data (includes non-Hispanics) for Little Village (see chart below).

IDPL believes that “[e]ducation is the power and freedom to live and enjoy the best of what this country has to offer. It is the power to provide for our [Latino] families and ensure a better quality of life” (IDPL).



Source: U.S. Census Bureau Note: Totals may not equal 100% due to rounding

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However, IDPL also believes that this power can be achieved through acculturation, without jeopardizing Latinos' cultural identity. The agency promotes acculturation to increase Latinos' participation in society, which is only achievable through education. IDPL recognizes that individuals (participants) have different backgrounds; therefore, it has devised techniques that more effectively meet participants' needs including: citizenship workshops; training programs; and, literacy programs (e.g., Spanish, computer, and financial). The agency also offers English as a Second Language (E.S.L.) and General Equivalency Diploma (G.E.D.) preparation classes, all of which, according to IDPL, accomplish the following objectives:

- Recruits and retains adult students in proper learning programs and teaches them to become lifelong learners.
- Teaches English to participants and helps them pass the G.E.D. test (also administered in Spanish).
- Assists adults with acculturation matters.

Many individuals who enroll in the G.E.D. classes have been out of school for years and are motivated to go back to school when they realize that a lack of education creates barriers to job opportunities and housing options, which also increases poverty levels. Their participation in IDPL's G.E.D. classes, for example, allows them to gain the necessary skills that they need in the job market. Below are two cases depicting the acculturation experiences of two Latinos, who were able to realize their economic and educational goals without losing their cultural identity.

#### *Case I*

In 1989, Enrique left his homeland in Mexico and came to the U.S. as an undocumented immigrant. Upon arriving, Enrique worked in the California fields picking fruit and vegetables. After some time, Enrique decided to apply for legal residency through the Amnesty program, which had been granted to thousands of hard-working undocumented immigrants. Enrique continued to work in the fields for five additional years before he decided to apply for citizenship, which would help him provide better opportunities for his family. According to Enrique, he was motivated to become a U.S. citizen because he wanted to get a better job in order to support his family, and because he wanted to vote.

In April of 2003, Enrique submitted his application for citizenship, and in October 2004 he became a U.S. citizen. Enrique was glad to have applied for citizenship and only regrets not having done so sooner. He states that a lack of English skills was the reason. Today, Enrique feels more confident with his English skills and feels that he can express his opinions more freely, and appreciates the right to vote for those candidates that best represent him. Indeed, Enrique is thankful to IDPL for helping him become a U.S. citizen. Moreover, the citizenship classes he attended not only helped him learn how the government works, but these also taught him ways to better assist his children with their homework.

Enrique's reasons for coming to the U.S. are like many other immigrants. He was motivated to acculturate to the economic and legal system when he realized that without doing so his work productivity would not be worth much; thus, unable to provide for his family as he would have wanted. Enrique understood that he needed to add mainstream skills to his core cultural ones to achieve a higher degree of success in the U.S.; therefore, he decided to undergo acculturation to those mainstream skills. While Enrique did participate in the educational training and even became a U.S. citizen, he never gave up his cultural identity.

*Case II*

When Celia was 16 she dropped out of high school and at the age of 17 she had her first child. Celia soon realized that she needed to work to support her child, but without any kind of certification or marketable skills, her employment options were bleak. Celia, however, did find employment with a company. About five years later, the company that she had been working for shut down and Celia found that she had limited choices as to what to do next. Celia knew she had to find a new job, but she also knew that it would be hard to get one without many marketable skills.

After considering her choices and with her family's support, Celia decided to go to IDPL for assistance instead of going to a mainstream agency. With the help of IDPL, Celia was able to acculturate to those mainstream skills that she needed to accomplish her economic goals including: a certificate as a certified nursing assistant; certificate in computer technology; G.E.D. certificate; and, even a driver's license. Celia admits that it was not easy going back to school and that it was scary. She questioned her ability to accomplish so many goals, but she continued to receive support from her family throughout her acculturation process.

It was important for Celia to obtain marketable skills to improve her chances of realizing economic opportunities. Celia's primary motivation was her child, who she was eager to take economic responsibility for, and her family. To achieve her goal, Celia had to acculturate to the educational system, which would make her more marketable. Celia understood that the labor market would only compensate her more if she had specialized skills, which could only be obtained through education. Her reason for acculturating was to prove to herself that she could be a responsible mother and provide for both herself and child. Like Enrique, Celia only acculturated to the set of skills that she needed to function in mainstream society. When she chose to attend classes at IDPL instead of a mainstream school, it was clear that she wanted to maintain her cultural identity.

Both Enrique's and Celia's cases show individuals subscribing to selective acculturation and subjecting themselves to the necessary training in order to participate in larger society, while maintaining their culture, as proposed by Gordon, Keefe, and Padilla. In both instances, the acculturation that was carried out was done to realize economic and social opportunities, benefits that would, in turn, be redirected to their family members and not just for individual development. The commitment to family, not to their individual self, is what motivated Enrique and Celia to acculturate to other mainstream values, which shows their commitment to their non-mainstream culture. Moreover, the success that Enrique and Celia realized was due to IDPL's support services, for example, IDPL staff members understood the culture and were also bilingual. This also suggests that there is a great need for institutions like IDPL, which understand that embracing both formal training and respect for the Mexican culture is critical for enabling individuals to fully participate in society.

The joint effort, between IDPL and participants, has enabled a larger number of Mexicans to partake in the economy to a greater extent—allowing them to reap more benefits as they become active members of U.S. society. Proper incorporation into the economic system triggers a chain reaction for Mexicans who choose to participate. It gives Mexicans access to IDPL's educational courses and job training programs, resulting in employment opportunities, which leads to more financial stability, lower poverty levels and, in some cases, an opportunity to vote. Enrique's and Celia's cases shed light on individuals' reasons for acculturation; concerns and fears when adopting new cultural values; and, results from integrating. IDPL's ability to devise programs that encompass both essential skills needed for functioning in mainstream society and safeguarding of cultural identity, has not only managed to effectively attract Latinos to undergo acculturation, but it also has implications for other organizations and businesses in the area.

### **Employment Opportunities Oblige Mexicans to Acculturate**

Mirna Garcia, Associate Director at IDPL, says that individuals who decided to participate in the Workforce

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*When it's time to fill out job applications, Mexicans who do not speak English are reminded that acculturation is not a choice, but a requirement.*

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Development Program (job training), on average, secured jobs where they earned \$9.70/hour. This, however, depends on the industry that they choose and represents an increase in wages (about one to two dollars an hour) upon completion of the job training programs. Needless to say, the program's results influenced other Mexicans' decisions to acculturate to those skills offered in the program. Their main motive for acculturation to the job training program is to make more money and to better provide for their.

One of the most compelling reasons that forces Mexicans to undergo acculturation is when they find that an organization is unable to help them because they do not meet certain criteria. This is especially true when they visit the unemployment office. According to Yvette Garcia, a trainer at the Illinois Employment and Training Center at Pilsen, customers who seek assistance with their employment search are immediately asked about their background: school level, job experience, and language skills. "These are the primary factors that determine our ability to help them," said Garcia. She states that her first recommendation to individuals is to get a G.E.D., if they do not already have one and will refer them to IDPL. "I feel that I can help them more if they can get at least some basic education," stated Garcia. There's an upside to having Garcia tell her customers that they need to speak English or get a G.E.D. as she also explains "how" they can begin tackling issues that prevent them from achieving their economic goals.

When it's time to fill out job applications, Mexicans who do not speak English are reminded that acculturation is not a choice, but a requirement. In many instances, job applications will only be available in English and filling these out can prove to be a most frustrating and scary experience to those with a language barrier. These documents are also indicative of the language used in the workplace—a tough reality to accept by many Mexicans, but also a good reason for them to immerse themselves into English language courses. Moreover, once in the workplace, if workers fail to follow orders due to their inability to communicate in English, they risk being fired and ceasing their opportunity for economic progress until they manage to find another job. The imperative need to learn the dominant language is reinforced when they repeat the process of

### Acculturation Model Used by Mexicans and Businesses in Little Village to Realize Economic and Social Opportunities



finding a new job. The motive to acculturate, in this case, has to do with trying to preserve a job for the sake of survival, avoiding interruption to an individual's economic progress, and their family's well-being.

Having access to medical benefits can also have a great influence on Mexicans' willingness to acculturate and become full participants in society. Maria, a business owner in Little Village, stated that even though her business makes enough income for her family to live off, her husband Carlos had to work at his full-time job for the sake of getting good medical coverage for the family. Maria has some medical conditions that require constant doctor's visits. "It is so costly if I buy it [insurance] outside on my own," said Maria. In Carlos' case, he has acculturated to mainstream work values because of his wife Maria's medical needs. What is also important to note is that like Carlos, the majority of other immigrants in Little Village are willing to initiate their own acculturation as they understand that not participating in the dominant society, at least at some level, is detrimental to their overall well-being.

### **Implications of Mexicans Acculturation on Business (Marketing) Techniques**

Little Village Mexicans have a tremendous amount of influence in the way business is conducted in the area. Mexicans' acculturation has implications for every business in Little Village. According to Max Diaz, a State Farm Insurance agent, "People [Mexicans] want to do business with people they can relate to and feel they can trust...There are so many businesses that are thriving because of that" (Steele). This suggests that it will be difficult for businesses to see a significant increase in their market share if marketers do not use the community's established acculturation model, which works best in Little Village as Mexicans are not fully assimilating to the mainstream culture. The diagram on page 10 gives a general sense of what the acculturation model looks like (taking research and activities in the community into account). The model gives insight into some of the acculturation techniques that both Mexicans and businesses are using to reach economic opportunities. On the one hand, Mexicans' acculturation to English and education has helped them realize additional economic opportunities like a promotion at work, all while preserving their core cultural values. On the other hand, long-established businesses in Little Village have been using tailored marketing techniques with their Mexican customers to better reach these. New marketers in the community can use the model to make more informed marketing decisions. For example, (new) financial institutions will need to build relationships with customers; provide hands-on customer service; and, hire appropriate staff.

In the article, "Formal and informal financing in a Chicago ethnic neighborhood," Philip Bond and Robert Townsend of the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago "...suggest that formal sector institutions attempt to create more flexible financial instruments by either using or mimicking existing informal and semiformal structures" (p 24). In essence, Bond and Townsend are proposing that banks develop less rigid marketing techniques by copying or using the traits in the existing system, suggesting that financial institutions can realize a higher level of economic success if they make use of established models like the one being used in Little Village.

Second Federal Savings (SFS) has proved to be one of the most successful banks in Little Village because it factors in the community's acculturation model (e.g., employs bi-cultural and bilingual staff and offers remittance services to Mexico) when it devises its marketing techniques—but this was not always the case. When the bank first organized in 1882, the neighborhood was predominantly Polish. In the 1970s, when

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*Little Village Mexicans have a tremendous amount of influence in the way business is conducted in the area. Mexicans' acculturation has implications for every business in Little Village.*

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Mexicans began moving into the community, SFS' customer base changed, from being highly Polish to Mexican. Marketers at SFS adapted to this shift by learning more about its Mexican customers' goals, which helped them reevaluate their business model and marketing techniques. Understanding what the Mexican community was seeking to achieve was imperative to SFS' marketers because it enabled them to more efficiently align its products and services with Mexican customers' needs. SFS even tailored its mortgage lending practices to serve the Mexican market more effectively, increasing its market share.

SFS is taking the lead on special initiatives that have already increased their market share, which include: accepting Matriculas (an alternative form of identification issued by the Mexican Consulate to Mexican nationals, regardless of their legal status in the U.S.); and, ITINs (accepted at SFS to open interest-bearing accounts and to apply for mortgage loans). SFS's marketing techniques demonstrate an understanding of Mexicans' culture and goals, which is why many immigrants like Joel have decided to become a customer. Joel states that he appreciates being assisted by staff members who understand his culture and speak Spanish. Moreover, Joel says that he enjoys some of SFS's perks, like free money orders, among other things; and, the ability to remit money back to Mexico inexpensively—all under the same roof.

In a presentation to the Federal Reserve Bank of Chicago, SFS's CEO, Mark Doyle, states that Chicago and Illinois have been the leaders in serving the Mexican market (beating Los Angeles—city with the largest number Mexicans in the nation). Moreover, Doyle says that his bank has been at the forefront of such efforts and at a profit. His report suggests that, if (new) financial institutions are looking to apply mainstream practices to the Mexican market they will more than likely not generate the same profit level that SFS is currently enjoying. Indeed, SFS serves as an exemplary model to other businesses in the Little Village community, which are trying to increase their market share.

### **Little Village's Big Picture**

Mexicans in the Little Village community like Joel are focused on what Keefe and Padilla call selective acculturation, as seen in the activities at Instituto Del Progreso Latino. Established businesses in the community, dating back to the late 1960s, have long known about their Mexican customers' preferences and have used the acculturation model to more effectively draw them into their stores. The model has only gained momentum across the years, chiefly because of the growing Mexican market. Businesses that have used the model wisely have seen their profits soar. These profits, along with reports on the remittance business and mortgage market have signaled the sales potential in Little Village, which has lured new mainstream companies, mainly banks, into the community. Mainstream businesses, however, need to adopt the Little Village acculturation model to tap into the sales potential of this growing market. Second Federal Savings has shown that using the acculturation model allows bank marketers to better serve their Mexican customers. The bank has reached a high level of success and is the most popular bank in the community. What is also interesting is that even those Mexicans who move out of Little Village remain loyal to the bank and other businesses—they continue to return for the unique products and services that help them achieve their economic and social goals.

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