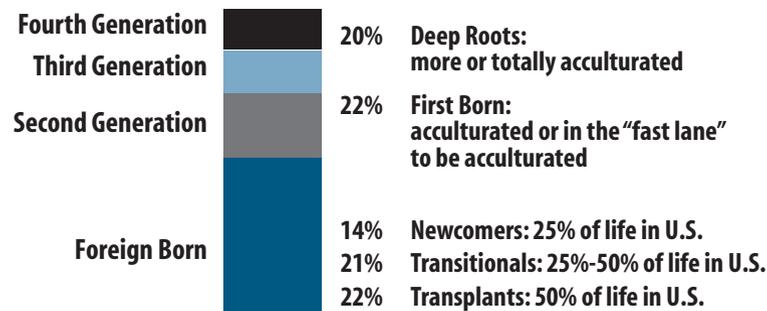


Acculturation: A Non-Linear Process

Why is understanding acculturation important? In a nutshell, when your customers grew-up in a different country than your own, they are “different” from a marketing communications perspective than, say the average American consumer; Most foreign-born consumers acquired their values and life skills in a different country with a different culture than main-stream American culture; their “mind-set,” expectations and values may be quite different or expressed differently than the “traditional” American consumer. In addition, information gaps exist regarding their market place knowledge. In some cases American brands, products or service awareness may be very limited.

Upon arrival in the United States, immigrants come into contact with American culture and soon begin to observe that the lifestyles, customs, aspirations, values, etc., are somewhat or very different from their own. What is considered a given in their home country now may be questioned, reassessed, and sometimes replaced with a different viewpoint or way of doing things. As they become familiar with the way of life and traditions in the United States immigrants adapt and can, for example, develop new life-styles, social protocols, and/or a different way of understanding the world around them. To talk and sell to these consumers successfully, it is essential to know them very well, and the *Acculturation model* is - a strategic tool to manage the growing Hispanic market – can be of tremendous help in this respect. Figure below illustrates the estimated acculturation segments of the Hispanic markets’

Landscape of Acculturation Today



Source: Adapted from C. Arce, Ph. D. in M. I. Valdes, 2000 (PMP)

Slowly but steadily, the acculturation process - “the process of adaptation to the new countries’ culture and society” begins, and will most likely continue for several generations. Acculturation is not automatic and not linear – some consumer behaviors acculturate faster than others, and does not take place at the same rate with every person either. For example, since the the acculturation process is *not linear nor automatic*. Studies conclude that, depending on factors such as the socio-economic background of the family, their social milieu some U.S. born Latino children and adults can acculturate much slowly than others. (More in sections below)

It is common to find in the same Hispanic household members with varying degrees of acculturation to American culture. The children, born in the US – or if they migrated as babes – can be highly accultur-

ated. The parents, if foreign-born, arrived in the U.S. most likely as young adults and they themselves are learning the language and how to make it, however, they can never replace their formative years and life in their country of origin. The grandparents in the household most likely migrated at an older age and are non-acculturated. It is much harder for them to change their habits, their language or their values at an older age.

The process of acculturation takes place at all levels of social interaction (see *The Ecosystemic Model* section later in this chapter). Understanding its dynamics is critical to defining the Hispanic business opportunity, selecting your target market segments – or “sweet spot” – in-culture, and learning how to market, interact, communicate, and work with the Hispanic consumer market while acculturating. Abundant research conducted over the past decades indicates that identifiable Hispanic cultural traits can be found in U.S. Hispanic families even when they have resided in the United States for several generations.

Because new immigrants arrive daily, the acculturation process is continuously changing and remains a moving target. While some quickly learn how to get around in the new culture, others are slowly learning the ropes, as many arrive in the U.S. and must start the process from stage zero.

In addition, the Hispanic community evolves and changes fueled in part by Hispanic culture “coming of age” with a strong demographic presence but also in business, politics, the media, the arts, and more. Advertisers and marketers need to “update” their acculturation insights continually to communicate in synch with Hispanic consumers. Ad campaigns and other marketing efforts targeting Hispanics must successfully communicate with a market that is conspicuously new, as well as one that has varying degrees of knowledge about the category or the brand.

To be effective, campaigns targeting Hispanic consumers must be engaging and emotionally moving in consonance with the Hispanic culture at all message levels: symbolic, explicit, visual, and subliminal.

Acculturation Factors

There are many external factors that play a role in acculturation, circumstances over which the person has little or no control. For example, the size of the Hispanic community or neighborhood in which Latinos grow up may either accelerate or slow the acculturation process. A neighborhood with a large Hispanic population tends to slow down the acculturation process. An individual who lives and works in a predominantly Anglo environment will probably adopt some cultural traits faster. Another external factor that affects the degree of acculturation is the level of acceptance or rejection by the community. If Hispanics are accepted and integrated into American society, rather than isolated, their chances for a faster acculturation process are greater. The acculturation pace also varies according to age. Children and adolescents have a much easier time than adults adapting to new circumstances. Other factors affecting the nature and speed of acculturation are internal to the individual and include psychological characteristics, educational level, economic status, and the presence or absence of personal and family networks.

When immigrants are educated, financially stable, surrounded by friends and family familiar with the language or an American support network, they tend to acculturate faster. Finally, some social behav-

iors and cultural aspects can be assimilated faster than others. For example, learning a new language is easier than adopting new values. Core cultural values and beliefs are usually difficult to change. This is true across socioeconomic groups and is independent of years of residence in the U.S. or even number of generations living in America. Foreign-born, first-generation individuals and families who move to the United States could be described as the pioneers. They tend to be more innovative and less passive than relatives who come to join them later or second-generation siblings and children who are born in the U.S.

Retro-Acculturation

Retro-acculturation, a term coined by Hispanic marketing researcher Carlos E. Garcia, refers to the conscious search for ethnic identity or roots, especially by second, third, or fourth-generation Latinos who feel they have lost their cultural identity. These individuals tend to be assimilated into mainstream American culture yet would like to enjoy and recover the culture of their parents and grandparents.

Hispanics who choose retro-acculturation typically want to learn Spanish, have their children learn Spanish, and appreciate their cultural heritage (values, music, arts, food and so on). They are proud of their heritage and welcome ethnic recognition in advertising and promotion of brands and services. As consumers, they may patronize brands that target Hispanics, or may watch Spanish-language TV and listen to Spanish-language programming. They also tend to support Hispanic-related candidates. A sense of ethnic identity and pride tends to motivate these behaviors. This sub-segment of the Hispanic market is growing steadily as the Latino middle class continues to grow.

Managing Cultural Differences

The “cultural divide” among Hispanics and between Hispanics and other Americans is still wide. Most Hispanic men and women arrive in the United States as adults, bringing with them the culture acquired in their Latino, non-Anglo societies. As mentioned earlier, the extent to which these immigrants participate in American society affects how fast they incorporate and adapt into mainstream American culture.

Therefore, immigrant consumers’ indigenous cultures can act as “filters” to relating or understanding mainstream advertising and communications messages that lack *cultural affinity*. This can rapidly diminish the effectiveness and sales results of a marketing campaign. For example, some products, brands, or services may be popular with the general U.S. market because they are a part of their history growing up. However, this does not necessarily apply to the foreign-born U.S. resident or newly arrived immigrant consumers who may lack the knowledge, emotional connection, or experience with these products, brands or services.

Studies we conducted over the years have shown that depending on the country of origin, and/or the degree of urbanization of their former places of residence, recent immigrants may not be familiar with or even know about some products. For example, in one study we conducted a few years back with recent immigrants from Mexico and other countries in Central America, we learned some women in the West and Southwest washed their hair with hand soap because it is the common practice in the

small town where they were raised, and according to them, “it works”. However, this practice did not exist among recent immigrants who migrated from large urban areas in the same countries. Similarly, another study on infant care revealed that some Hispanic mothers continue to wrap their newborn babies tightly with a cloth to “make sure the belly button heals safely”, while others did not bathe their infants until their belly buttons had healed. Some refuse to take “sitz baths” at the hospital after delivering their babies for at least two weeks. This, as we learned, was to avoid contact with impure water, a common occurrence in their native towns, and subsequently avoid infections.

These are but a few examples illustrating how Hispanic consumers from different countries can relate to or use products differently, and how important cultural affinity is in marketing communications. Messages, creative strategies, visuals, and symbols must be selected with the consumer’s socio-cultural background in mind. The point is not that marketers and advertisers promote old behavior practices (e.g. not bathing an infant), but, for example, that they become aware of and have respect and understanding for the cultural differences that exist. Only then can they develop the appropriate in-culture strategy – one that incorporates the consumer’s knowledge and practices, and from that point of view introduces the new “modern” practices. This does not imply that the campaign will refer explicitly to the old practices necessarily, but present the “modern” solution addressing the benefits of the new proposed behavior from their context – in this case, “Water is always clean and safe in America; one more advantage for delivering your baby at our hospital”!

How we interact when we converse or greet each other differs by culture. What is perfectly acceptable in one culture may not be acceptable in another. Hence, to communicate memorable messages with impact, they need to be in synch with the cultural context and mindset of the target consumer. Imagine, for instance, a situation in which people from the same country converse with dear friends. They all speak the same language. Verbal language is the cultural bond easiest to observe, but it is only one of the many taking place simultaneously. For example, non-verbal behaviors (i.e. body language), shared cultural background (such as memories, events, customs, dress codes), and explicit and implicit social protocols common to people from the same social group are all examples of cultural bonds.

Verbal and non-verbal cues can vary significantly among cultures, so what makes sense to (or is “in harmony with”) members of one culture may mystify members of another culture. Our cultural software is present implicitly, on a conscious and unconscious level. We tend not to be aware of its influence; we take it for granted. We assume everybody “sees the world like me”. This is certainly the case when communicating with consumers of the same cultural and social group, but not always so when communicating *successfully* across cultures.

The following figure shows examples of cultural orientation differences between traditional Hispanics and the American middle class.

Value Orientation Differences Between Traditional Hispanics and the American Middle Class

	HISPANICS	ANGLOS
How we see and define ourselves	As part of a family clan or group	Within ourselves, as individuals
Whom we rely on for help	Family, friends, community (Hispanic “social security”)	Ourselves and institutions
What we value in people	Stress differences, show respect	Minimize differences, everybody’s the same
What we stress in relationships	Respect, cooperation, formality	Symmetrical interpersonal relationships, informality, competition
Children	Dependence, obedience	Independence, egalitarian
Family	Defined roles, hierarchy, old men know more than young men	Role diffusion, democracy, younger men have a say
Sex roles in social relationships	Male dominance, machismo	Gender equality

Context is also relevant in the communications process. Suppose you are designing a television advertisement for a Hispanic audience and the commercial requires the presence of a minor or a woman. Can you show a Hispanic child playing alone and unsupervised in a non-family environment? Can you show a Hispanic woman drinking an alcoholic beverage alone? A yes to these questions might well result in a commercial that could backfire. Why? Because these commercials even though created for Hispanic viewers – an in Spanish - reflect the lifestyles and idiosyncrasies of Anglo-American consumers, therefore, the Latino viewers will be distracted by a practice that is not common in the Hispanic culture, with the consequent loss of their attention and focus on the product and message being advertised. The advertising dollar wasted!

The prevalent attitude among some advertisers is that a “few adjustments here and there” are all that is needed to elicit the response of a Hispanic audience. Unfortunately, these minor adjustments overlook cultural nuances and differences. These variations may not be readily apparent to the management in a company and frequently are not detected with standardized copy testing methods or survey questionnaires. But the variations will surface when the campaign is aired – and may receive negative attention from the target audience or the expected sales results not realized. Ideally, campaign messages should be subjected to in-depth, unstructured qualitative probing in focus groups or one-on-one interviews with representatives of the targeted Hispanic consumer group.

The table on the next page summarizes some of the “typical” cultural differences we’ve compiled over the years from many sources.

Broad Cultural Differences Between Working Class Hispanics and the American Middle Class

HISPANICS	ANGLOS
Group oriented (“for my family”)	Self oriented (“for me”)
Larger families	Smaller families
Success tends to mean family, group satisfaction	Success tends to mean personal possessions, sat-individual satisfaction
Lean toward collectivism	Lean toward individualism
At least one daily meal involves elaborate food preparation	Daily meals are usually not prepared from scratch
Stress hierarchies, social class, social stratification, interdependence	Stress equality, equal rights, democracy, authority, symmetrical relationships, individual autonomy
Doctors and any established source of authority are respected and trusted and never questioned	Doctors and other established sources of authority may be respected and trusted but often are questioned
Believe in fate: gratification	Look for immediate gratification
“High-touch”, physical closeness, hugging, affectionate	“High-tech”, more physically distant
Spontaneous:	Planners:
Overt emotions are part of the culture	Hiding emotions is encouraged
Relaxed about time	Adhere to schedules
More sensitive to fashion	Relaxed about fashion
Longer social protocols, indirect	Brief, to the point, and direct
Pay more careful attention to clothing, appearance, and hairstyle	Far more relaxed and casual about clothing, appearance, and hairstyle
Adapt to environment	Change the environment
Low reliance on institutions	High reliance on institutions
Very decorative in homes	More casual about home decorations
Buy American products	Tend to buy imports
Value highly personal or personalized service	Value fast, efficient service at arm’s length
Appreciate being given all the needed time (the more the better) when interacting with service providers	Appreciate efficiency, to the point
Rely more on mutual, implicit understanding	Rely more on explicit language
Tend to prefer known brands	Less likely to prefer prestige brands
Tend to live in larger households	Tend to have smaller households
Stress cooperation, participation, being a part of the group	Stress competition, achievement, motivation, self-competence

Traditional Latino Attitudes Towards Money

In traditional Latino culture, striving for money and success are not at the center of family values. As a matter of fact, a central tenet of these Latino family values is that “God loves the poor”; hence, it discourages many from thinking about money – not to mention “wealth”. This is a traditional Hispanic cultural trait that has its roots in the Catholic religion (still the dominant religion among Hispanics). The Bible says, “It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter heaven”. Lionel Sosa, CEO of the think tank Mexicans and Americans Thinking Together (MATT, www.matt.org), analyzes how Hispanic attitudes about money, success, and more are changing as the population acculturates, as shown in the next figure.

Old and New Attitudes Towards Traditional Hispanic Family Values

OLD ATTITUDE	NEW ATTITUDE
“Stay poor, go straight to heaven”	“It’s OK to have money. It’s OK to have a lot of money. God loves the poor as well as the rich”
“Drop out of school, get a job”	“Finish college, earn more, contribute more. It’s a better way to help the family
“We’ll never be able to afford college, so why invite disappointment by getting ready for it”	“Work smart and get prepared; the money will be there if you believe it will be there. Be creative and resourceful”.
“Any steady job is honorable”	“Set high goals for a dream career. You are capable of achieving anything you want. Go for it. You will be successful”.

These rich insights could be used, once tested, with target consumers to develop an in-culture, emotionally engaging strategy by addressing the “old view” indirectly and including the benefit for the family – from a positive perspective and always with respect.

Cultural vs. Socioeconomic Differences

It is necessary to keep in mind that “culture” is an abstract concept, a hypothetical construct that may be too broad and oversimplified when applied to an entire group of people, as it is to “Hispanics” in this case. It is usually true that a greater difference is found when the various socioeconomic classes are compared than when cultural groups are compared. It has been suggested to this author that may working-class Americans and African Americans are more closely aligned with the traditional Hispanic value orientation than with the orientation of middle-class Americans. Similarly, international research findings show the values of the predominant U.S. Hispanic culture to be closer to the working-class culture in their countries of origin (e.g. Central America, South America, and Mexico) than to the middle or upper class culture of these societies. This suggests that some cultural traits observed may be more socioeconomic than “ethnic” in nature.

For the purposes of discussing cultural differences between “Hispanic” and “non-Hispanic” market segments, the use of “culture” as a term is used here as a catch-all to refer to the average or most common denominator value orientation of each of the largest cultural groups being addressed, e.g. the “average U.S. Hispanic” and the “average, middle-class American,” to help get the concept across. The author is also aware these are presented in an over-simplified and generalized form. Culture within any society – or even an area or social group – is far richer, complex, and has multiple variations and nuances, but such depth is beyond the scope of this book.

Shared Cultural Roots

What we call “U.S. Latino culture” today has common historic roots. During the Age of Discovery (circa 1500), Spain, and to a lesser extent Portugal, conquered large regions of the Western Hemisphere, including most of Central America, South America, the Caribbean, Mexico, and parts of what is today the United States – specifically Texas, Arizona, Colorado, Nevada, Utah, New Mexico and California. Hence, the most common cultural features shared by nearly all Latin American countries are the Spanish language and the Catholic faith.

Other factors connect Latin American countries with Spain and Portugal as well. They include a tendency toward slower-paced economic, technological, and scientific development (Spain and Portugal were two of the last countries to join the Industrial Revolution). Latin American countries today still have large rural or semi-rural populations with little formal education and in some areas severe poverty. Most of these countries have not developed evenly, and they share in the struggle to survive and compete with more technologically and economically advanced neighbors or first-world countries, spawning a greater impetus for immigration for those in search of business advantages, technological advantages, or just a better life.

In addition, all Latin American countries were also greatly influenced by indigenous cultures, having had their own pre-Columbian civilizations. Examples include the Mayans and Aztecs in Mexico, the Incas in Peru, the Mapuches in Chile and Argentina, and the Guaranis in Paraguay, Columbia, and Venezuela. Many countries were also influenced by large immigration flows from northern and eastern Europe, Africa, and Asia during the 19th and 20th centuries. The influences of these various cultures are pervasive in the music Latinos enjoy singing and dancing to, as well as the different foods they eat, the religious and healing practices they follow, and their material goods, such as musical instruments and artifacts.

Thus, the knowledge of cultural and regional differences is valuable in the creative aspects of marketing, and it becomes very relevant when the target audience is a particular Hispanic subgroup.

Four Pillars: The Traditional Hispanic Culture

Some cultural traits, values and expressions are more prominent in the traditional Hispanic culture. I refer to these as the Four Pillars, and they include: Familismo, Machismo, Marianismo, and Chicoismo. Other cultural traits exist within the U.S. Hispanic culture as well, but they are less well represented than the “traditional” ones.

Familismo

Traditionally, the main pillar of Hispanic culture is the family, which includes the extended family of grandparents, uncles, aunts and cousins. The emphasis Hispanics place on relatives has been called *Familismo*. The family's needs and welfare take precedence over the individual member's needs. The family, as a group, is usually the first and only priority. This is reflected in the educational process within the family as well as in the family's expectations toward each other.

Parents are viewed as being obliged to make all sorts of sacrifices for the children. As a response, the child is expected to show gratitude; for example, assuming responsibility for younger siblings and for the parents in old age. The child internalizes at an early age the overwhelming and powerful role of the parents and the family; the mother tends to define herself as an individual mostly in terms of her family. The father enjoys more freedom, but he is responsible for the respectful behavior of his children, and feels morally responsible for the behavior of the whole family. Acculturating Hispanics tend to hold this particular cultural value more strongly than other cultural traits.

As the acculturation process advances both among foreign-borns who have spent most of their lives in the U.S. and their U.S.-born offspring, the traditional values are being replaced by the dominant Anglo-American value orientation and culture, as can be expected. This transition towards acculturation can be observed more markedly and deeply among U.S.-born, "New Millennials" and youth segments. (For more information, see M. I. Valdes, 2008, "Hispanic Customers for Life; A Fresh look at Acculturation", Paramount Market Publishers, Ithaca, NY. www.isabelvaldes.com)

It is not surprising, therefore – since family is a long-lasting Latino value – that so many Spanish-language advertising strategies revolve around the family, either explicitly or implicitly.

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Traditional Familismo vs. Acculturated Familismo

Familismo Traditional Cultural Qualities	Acculturation indicators
Collective, family-centered lifestyle	Family-centered, individual-friendly lifestyle
Family unity controls, dictates behavior	Family unity remains key; adapts to individual needs
Family excludes outsiders	Tolerates, accepts outsiders
Social life centers on the family	Extends to a broader social life
Face and formality are important	Flexibility in lifestyle, views, and attitudes
Space is communal/flexible	Recognized individual privacy (own space)
Traditional stance: acceptant, dutiful	Individual stance: pursues own plans

Machismo

Machismo is a complex set of beliefs, attitudes, values, and behaviors about the role of men that is pervasive in the "traditional" Hispanic culture. The concept refers to the roles men fulfill according to societal rules and how they view themselves with respect to their environment and other people. It goes

beyond how men treat women in stereotypically dominating ways, such as being "macho". It involves how men function as providers, protectors, and representatives of their families to the outer world. They have obligations and responsibilities to uphold the honor of family members, to deal effectively with the public sphere, and to maintain the integrity of the family unit. Machismo also refers to having socially acceptable, manly characteristics, such as being courageous, strong, and virile. The mainly image includes being seen as the head of the household, but listening to and being respectful of women. This traditional role provides much more freedom for men than women with regard to sexual activity and public, social interactions.

Traditional Machismo vs. Acculturated Machismo

Machismo Traditional Cultural Qualities	Acculturation Indicators
Husband/wife roles defined and separate	Roles shift to sharing the tasks
Accepts husband's dominance	Evolves a partnership with husband/males/elders
Father/males/elders are sole providers	Assists husband as provider
Father is uninvolved with raising the kids	Father assists mother: gets involved with kids

Marianismo

Marianismo is, to some extent, the female counterpart of machismo. The term refers to an excessive sense of self-sacrifice found among traditional and less acculturated Hispanic women – the more sacrifice, the better the mother, the better the spouse – many times to the detriment of the woman. "Marianismo" is derived from Mother Mary's sacrifice for her children. This cultural trait is supported by a complex set of deeply-rooted beliefs and values that determine how Hispanic women choose to live, or better said, not to live their lives. In my decades as a researcher, I observed first-hand how Marianismo drives traditional Latina mothers' decision-making process. For example, we found that many Hispanic mothers did not go or postponed going to the doctor even when they felt sick because they "needed to take care of the children and the house". Often, the traditional Hispanic woman does not feel she has the right to ask her spouse to cover for her. In her frame of mind, this would be considered "selfish".

Marianismo runs deeper among non-acculturated Latinas. They tend not to spend money on themselves, even if it is money they earn. From a marketing perspective, these non-acculturated Latina women trail behind their male counterparts in their English-language skills since they have more limited social interactions. Our research found a higher incidence of low self-esteem and depression among non-acculturated Latinas. One study conducted for a telephone service company showed that a significant number of young immigrant Latinas in Chicago who were not allowed to leave home by their husbands spend many hours on the phone, running high long-distance and international phone bills in search of emotional support from their relatives left behind.

However, Marianismo has positive aspects as well. These positive aspects are key to the Hispanic family. They include being a dedicated, loving, and supportive wife and mother, teaching the children Hispanic culture and religion, being a comadre (godmother, friend) in the community and being highly empathetic and ready to help those in need.

Traditional Marianismo vs. Acculturated Marianismo

Marianismo Traditional Cultural Qualities	Acculturation Indicators
Does not seek for herself	Develops own life: works, studies, joins groups
Believes in the fates	Controls her own fate
Focused on serving her family	Expands the focus to the community
Time is to be used to “do her duty”	Time management and efficiency
Food expresses her love and identity	Food is an important but rational issue

However, the negative aspects of Marianismo in the family can effect young Latinas growing up, and tend to breed low self-esteem and depression, which limits a young Latina’s personal potential. Latina teen pregnancies and school drop outs are on the rise, and low self-esteem is rampant in lower socio-economic groups of Hispanics. In 1998, The National Coalition of Hispanic Health and Human Services Organization, which closely tracks Latino health-related issues, conducted a study among Hispanic girls aged 9 to 12 and their parents. It found that “the prevalence of health risk behaviors such as suicide attempts, substance use, and teenage pregnancy” was pervasive among Latina teens.

These findings are consistent with other existing data on the subject. Living in two cultures while having to cope with stress and non-flattering feminine role models, in both the household and the community, are challenges that Latina teens are presently facing.

Chicoismo

Children and their potential better futures are usually the most cited reason for immigrating to the U.S. and sacrificing to succeed in a different country and language. Hispanic parents who migrate want to be able to offer their children the future and education they did not have.

An interesting difference between mainstream American and traditional Hispanic cultures is the “intensity” of the focus in child-rearing orientations. “Children [in Hispanic families] are not believed to be capable of acting independently until they reach maturity. . . . regardless of the physical and emotional development of the child. This leads to parental over-concern for keeping the child close and attached to the family”. This “over-concern” and familial attachment is a key Hispanic cultural value. From this germinates family clashes and stresses as Latino children long for the greater freedom and individuality their school peers experience. Talking from experience, this is a hard adjustment for the traditional Latino mother and father who do not always know what the “right behavior” is or how to enforce it. Certainly, this impacts the child’s decision-making process in purchases and, hence, the marketing and advertising strategy. For example, even the most basic children’s products, such as cereals and toys, benefit from including the mother (or another adult) in the creative strategy in order to close the sale more effectively in-culture.

Traditional Chicoismo vs. Acculturated Chicoismo

Chicoismo Traditional Cultural Qualities	Acculturation Indicators
Self affirmation through her children	Pursues own aspirations, education, etc
Protects and isolates her children	Lets go, allows outside participation