Cultural Role Confusion and Memories of a Lost Identity: How Non-Consumption Perpetuates Marginalisation

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Using Indian Punjabi Sikh men living in Britain as our sample group we argue that existing consumer acculturation theories are both limited and inaccurate in their renderings of consumer behaviour. This is illustrated by using a culturally marginalised group who are unable to engage with, let alone negotiate through the use of product consumption, daily interactions between South Asian and British White cultures. Using an ethno-consumerist methodology, our findings indicate cultural marginality arises from a combination of racism and in-group prejudice. Marginality, we suggest, results in the deliberate, self-destructive, non-engagement with culturally laden consumer objects.

INTRODUCTION

Using a variety of acculturation models, we argue that existing consumer acculturation theories are both limited and inaccurate in their renderings of consumer behaviour. This is illustrated by using Indian Punjabi Sikh men living in Britain1 who are unable to engage with, let alone negotiate through the use of product consumption, daily interactions between South Asian2 and British White cultures. This paper, therefore, addresses previous calls for wider, more extensive, research into ethnic minority individuals and their groups, within the stream of post-assimilationist research (Bhatia 2002).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Culture and ethnicity

Keesing’s (1974) identification of culture as three ideational themes: cognitive, structuralist and symbolic has important implications for understanding consumer acculturation. The cognitive system argues that individuals are cognitively dependent on the categories and distinctions within their language, where the non-existence of words can be attributed to that specific concept not being available to people using that language (Hayes 1994). The structuralist system argues that culture is embodied in the group’s social organisations and structures, taught, for example, through the family unit or religious institutions. Finally, symbolic culture can be separated into objective culture (an object whose status can be publicly verified) and subjective culture (how a group perceives and controls their social environment through norms, roles, rules and values) (Triandis and Vassiliou 1972). Considering these systems, culture has been classified using the terms “collectivism” and “individualism”. A central tenet of collectivism is the need for individuals to form groups where connectedness, mutual deference or compromise and social interdependence are actively encouraged (Tafarodi and Swann Jr 1996). Individualistic cultures however encourage and enforce the right of the individual to be assertive, autonomous, creative, emotionally independent and use their own initiative (Tafarodi and Swann 1996; Triandis et al. 1988). British and Indian culture have been identified with the latter and former respectively (Lindridge, Hogg and Shah 2004).

An individual’s identification with a specific culture is also identifiable with ethnicity, where an individual defines themselves and others into specific groups using ethnic labels (Venkatesh 1995). This process of self-identification is facilitated by perceived differences between the various ethnic groups, identified on the basis of: etiquette, language, morality, religion and values (Webster and Faircloth 1994).

Finally, cultural identification may also be derived from how strongly one identifies with that group in a particular situation (Jamal and Chapman 2000). Such behaviour is widely referred to as felt ethnicity, i.e. ethnically-based decisions are increasingly likely to be made in those situations where members of the same ethnic group are encountered. An ethnic minority individual might then unconsciously recall a culturally orientated collective self-identity whenever they encounter a relevant cultural situation (Lindridge, Hogg and Shah 2004).

Acculturation

How an ethnic minority negotiates their cultural identity can be attributed to acculturation. Acculturation was defined by the Social Science Research Council (1954, p. 974) as a “Culture change that is initiated by the conjunction of two or more autonomous cultural systems”. Ward and Kennedy (1993) in an attempt to distinguish between the group and individual attitudes and behaviours, distinguish acculturation into two distinct outcomes: psychological and socio-cultural. The former refers to a set of internal psychological outcomes, such as the individual being ultimately satisfied existing in their new culture. The latter refers to external psychological outcomes that relate individuals to their new cultural environment, and the acquisition of social skills and behaviours appropriate to engage with the new society.

In identifying how acculturation affects ethnic minority individuals, three models are worthy of further discussion. First, Berry (1992) proposed ethnic minority individuals can be categorised into four distinct acculturation strategies, with ‘marginalisation’ (rejection in both their ethnic minority culture and the dominant culture) being relevant to our argument. Hutnik (1991) using South Asians in Britain, in keeping with Berry, identified marginality as an individual who constructs a socially orientated identity, such as “I am a good football player.”

Bourhis et al.’s (1997) Interactive Acculturation Model (IAM), developing Berry’s work further, argued that ethnic-minority members acculturation strategies are inter-linked with the acculturation orientations of host-majority members; the latter group, due to their influence and power in society, having a stronger influence on the acculturation preferences of ethnic minorities. According to the IAM, concordance occurs when the host society and the ethnic-minority group share virtually similar acculturation orientation attitudes and behaviours, with discordance occurring when the host society and the minority groups reflect little or no commonality (Bhouris et al., 1997). Marginality, building upon Berry’s (1994) strategies, may then be attributed to the ethnic minority individual rejecting their own community / identity and being rejected by the dominant cultural group.

1Defined as second generation descendents of migrants from the Indian state of the Punjab and who can be self-identified as Sikhs.
2The term ‘South Asian’ is used inter-changeably for various ethnic groups, who self-identify with each other through a common descent from the Indian sub-continent, but retain unique differences in their identities.
Bhatia’s (2002) dialogical model of acculturation draws upon the philosophical assumptions of social constructionism, representing a critical, dynamic, flexible and holistic approach. Bhatia (2002) argues that acculturation and identity are both dynamic, with the ethnic minority individual creating multiple presentations of the self, depending on other individuals and situations encountered. The creation of multiple identities draws upon Oswald’s (1999) argument that ethnic minority individuals conduct a code switching process, this process of code switching allowing an ethnic minority individual to draw upon appropriate ethnic minority or host cultural values in appropriate situations. Consequently, ethnic minority individuals encounter “a dialogical process that involves a constant moving back and forth between incompatible cultural positions...between the I positions of feeling simultaneously as-similated, separated and marginalized” (Bhatia 2002: 57). Hence, acculturation becomes the enactment of a variety of codes, representing the creation of multiple identities amongst ethnic minority individuals (Lindridge, Hogg and Shah 2004), using the dialogical model of acculturation, argued that marginality amongst Indians in Britain arose from the wider issues of self-imposed and community and society rejection, culminating in a failure within ethnic minority individuals to be able to conduct code switching of identities.

Marginality then represents a sense of exclusion. Khatib-Chahiddi, Hill and Paton (1998) in their study of cross-cultural marriages identified two types of marginality relevant to this study: structural marginality (differences arising from culture, ethnicity and social-class) and familial marginality (feelings of difference / exclusion from the family). As both society and family are central to self-identity, it may be argued that these can be expected to influence an ethnic minority person’s ability to construct multiple-identities.

**Consumer acculturation and consumption**

Our possessions ability to carry and communicate cultural meanings “contribute to the construction of the culturally constituted world precisely because they are a vital, tangible record of cultural meaning that is otherwise intangible” (McCracken, 1986, p. 73). Product consumption can therefore symbolise identification with a given culture, and can be identified as ‘ethnic emblems’ (Hoyer and McInnis, 2001), providing individuals with the means to construct a culturally derived self-identity. This may then allow ethnic minority individuals to identify and code products, facilitating their acculturation process, with either the dominant or their own ethnic group. Product consumption then becomes indicative of an individual or group accessing and owning a prescribed set of symbolic culture cultural values, identifiable with Keesing’s (1974) symbolic system of culture. Such behaviours have been indirectly noted amongst Indian migrants, to Canada and the USA, by Joy and Dholakia (1991) and Mehta and Belk (1991).

McCracken (1986) noted that products act as performance agents, allowing their user to adapt to specific situations. From an ethnic minority perspective, such behaviours have been noted amongst South Asians in Britain by Jamal and Chapman (2000) and Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004). These findings, indirectly drawing upon Bourhis et al.’s (1997) acculturation theory, indicated that the consumption patterns of ethnic minorities may demonstrate varying levels of assimilation and disassociation with both the dominant and their own ethnic cultures. This demonstration of cultural adherence in varying situations may represent the individual’s internal dialogical voice undergoing “a multiplicity of I positions” (Hermans et al. 1992). In differing situations encountered, possessions may then become a means to assist in the construction of these multiple identities, as identified by Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004). An influence on situational consumption is noted by Sekhon (2003), who argues that an ethnic minorities generational level, will ultimately affect consumption laden identities. However, research into consumer acculturation and identity has not studied how the concept of consumer acculturation, multiple identities and consumption affects marginalised ethnic minority individuals. More importantly, previous research appears to assume that an ethnic minority individual is both able and capable of constructing consumption laden multiple identities, as a means of negotiating differing cultural situations.

The role of products as acculturation agents remains under-investigated. However, research does indicate a relationship between selective cultural values and product consumption. For example, consumer acculturation studies in the USA by Peñaloza (1994), taking an ethnographic approach, showed how Hispanic people in the USA used products to demonstrate assimilation; while Oswald (1999) referring to the Haitian population in the USA noted that product consumption represented a layering of identities constructed around cultural personas as and when required. Similar research in Britain reflects ethnic minorities comfortably using consumption as a means of engaging with the wider British white culture. For example, Jamal and Chapman’s (2000) study of Pakistani living in Britain suggested a switching of identities in varying situations. An observation developed further by Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004) who argued that product consumption enabled Indian women to engage more actively and comfortably in a variety of culturally construed situations. However, these studies infer a positive consumer acculturation perspective, with ethnic minorities gladly engaging with the consumption process as a wider indication and means of engaging with their dominant society’s cultural values. Alternative consumer acculturation studies that investigate ethnic minority’s consumer acculturation failures do not appear to have been researched. Such a lack of research may, therefore, present a biased perspective presenting predominately White audiences with a belief that all ethnic minorities ultimately desire and seek assimilation through product consumption.

**METHODOLOGY**

This research is an exploratory study into consumer acculturation and marginality. To identify a marginalised ethnic minority group, this research selected Indian Punjabi Sikh males living in Britain, satisfying both methodological and research criterion. Methodologically the population represents an ethnic group in terms of religion (Sikhism) and being descended from the Punjab region of India (therefore eliminating those Indians in Britain descended from immigrants from India via Africa or other parts of South Asia).

The 2001 census (HMSO, 2003) indicated that the British population consisted of approximately 60 million people, including 2 million people who identified themselves of South Asian descent. Of these, just over 1 million people claimed to be descended from India; with 13% of these stating their religion to be ‘Sikh’. Jacob et al., (1998) found that Indian Punjabi’s living in Britain were more likely, when compared to ‘Whites’, to suffer from depressive ideas (worthlessness and suicidal thoughts). One potential outlet for this depression is alcohol consumption, which indicates a higher rate of psychiatric admission for Sikhs in Britain owing to alcohol dependence (Ananthaikanarayan, 1994).

Researching Indian Punjabi Sikhs living in Britain as a consumer group is also justified by previous research. Parekh (1994: 615) suggests a “preoccupation with making money [which] is also a common and persistent feature of the...[Indian]...diaspora” with Dasgupta (1989: 85, italics–authors additions) noting that amongst Indian migrants to North America “conspicuous consumption,
of material goods like a big house, expensive cars, maintaining a specific lifestyle have become important criteria within the Indian community [in the USA]. Acceptance of the value, achievement orientation, in a materialistic society has made Indian immigrants measure success in terms of material possessions”. Indian Punjabi Sikhs living in Britain, therefore, appear to demonstrate both a propensity to consume and potential acculturation difficulties, identified through mental health problems.

Sample group
The sample group of Indian Punjabi Sikh men were drawn from Sandwell in the West Midlands, Britain. The choice of this area was supported by the 2001 Census (HMSO, 2003) which noted that, with the exception of London, the West Midlands has the highest percentage of people identifying themselves as non-‘White’ in England, i.e. 11.2% compared to the average of 9.1%. In this non-White population, 8% are self-defined as Indian and live in concentrated communities in Wolverhampton, Sandwell and Coventry. These areas also have the highest proportion of Sikhs in England at 2% of the total population compared to an average of 0.7% (HMSO 2003).

Sandwell suffers from a variety of socio-economic deprivations, including above average levels of unemployment, and is considered to be in the top ten of England’s poorest places. The 2001 census (HMSO, 2003) showed that 45.6% of the population have no academic qualification, and when combined with one of the lowest economic activity rates in England, may explain why 37% of people living in Sandwell do not have access to or use of a car. Compounding this situation is 30% of residents of Sandwell live in rented accommodation. These statistics when considered with the population’s low socio-economic status, therefore, may suggest a heightened desire to consume or attribute values to product consumption, owing to their own potential inability to consume.

To engage with people who were potentially marginalised ethnic minorities required access to people who demonstrated related behaviours attributed to marginalisation, such as cultural identity loss. Participants were recruited through the use of advertisements placed within a centre that helps people with substance misuse problems. The participants were self selected based on the sampling criteria.

Data collection and analysis
Meamber and Venkatesh’s (2000) ethno-consumerist framework was used in this research. Stage one of the research processes involved a comprehensive review of acculturation and consumer behaviour literature. Analysis of the literature then prompted stage two, consisting of thirty-two participants being interviewed for one to three hours each, followed by one mini-focus group to validate the research findings, followed by data analysis and concluding with theory development.

Ghunam’s (1998) acculturation questionnaire, using a seven point Likert scale, was administered to 35 potential participants to assess marginality, with only three participants completing the questionnaire. The remaining participants demonstrated heightened levels of frustration, unable to commit to a psychometric scale choice, manifesting in swearing aloud, hitting chairs and pacing around the research room. With the awareness that the questionnaire may then be detrimental to the participant’s psychological well-being, along with the difficulty of managing bias in assistance and interpretation of the psychometric instrument, the questionnaire was withdrawn. Tentative discussions revealed that the participants were unable to answer the questions, as they felt the questions related to specific cultural issues they did not agree with or identify with, which was taken as indicative of marginality. The in-depth interview confirmed their cultural marginality.

The interviews were conducted by one of the authors who matched the sample group criteria of being: male, Sikh, Punjabi descent. Interviews were conducted in either English or Punjabi depending upon the participant’s wishes.

Data interviews were transcribed verbatim, with the transcripts read and then re-read, producing preliminary codes which were transcribed onto coded data sheets. These sheets were annotated to allow for identification of comparisons, metaphors and tropes in the data (Meamber and Venkatesh 2000). This process allowed for the identification of cultural categories of consumption and relationships between the emerging cultural categories (Lindridge, Hogg and Shah 2004). Finally, the generated consumption-oriented meanings derived from the data were presented to a mini-focus group of six participants to validate the research findings.

FINDINGS
To understand and construct how multiple identities affect the consumer acculturation process of marginal Indian Punjabi Sikh males, it is important first to locate the origins of their marginality.

Social histories
Social histories aim to investigate the origins of marginality amongst the participants. Familial marginality, focussing on Indian cultural values of caste and childhood socialisation, was a dominant theme in the participants’ narratives. Participants (n = 26) complained that older members of their families (i.e. parents, grandparents, uncles and older siblings) had prevented them from socialising with South Asians from differing castes or religions:

I have friends who are Muslims and Valmiks. W and me ate from the same plate, but my older brother hated it and told me so and beat me up… I hated him then and we don’t talk anymore. (P30)

Violence from older siblings was not unusual (n = 12), often arising from the participant’s perceived breaking of cultural norms and widely perceived to be endorsed by either family members or by older siblings to act out their own acculturation stressors:

My older brother used to get me [to] have fight with his mates and they’d take bets… was eleven or twelve [years old]… if I didn’t he’d lock me up and kick me in. (P2)

Participants experiences left them feeling lost and abandoned confirming that their culture, which they believed supposedly endorsed family values allowed and indirectly endorsed a variety of domestic violent acts. These experiences encouraged assimilation into British White society, which were often met with experiences of racism (n=32) and in-group prejudice (n=24). These experiences left participants expressing deep sadness, culminating in a fragmented sense of cultural and ethnic identity, i.e. marginality.

Cultural marginality-‘Mein kon hun?’ (Who am I?)
For the majority of participants (n = 21) feelings of loss, pain, regret and shame in not being able to express or own a consolidated sense of identity were recurring themes. One contributing factor to participants’ identity confusion was demonstrated in their varying degrees of English and Punjabi language fluency. Five participants declared that they only spoke English (n = 5) arising from parental socialisation encouraging conformity to British White society and
rejection of old, traditional Indian cultural values. Yet, for some participants (n = 17) who were able to speak Punjabi, language choice provided a small means to demonstrate personal power and vengeance in their daily lives, demonstrating rebellion against their Indian Sikh culture but also created other tensions in their lives:

*I only talk English at home. She [his mother] can’t speak English and I can’t talk Punjabi [though the person has been heard by the researcher talking some Punjabi]. I just ignore her. We hardly talk.* (P15)

A central theme regarding loss of ethnicity / identity was religion, with participants (n=27) attributing their non-belief to its minimum role during childhood socialisation and the hypocrisy they experienced in their engagements with religion. Consequently, loss of religion diminished important cultural behaviours, functions, roles and transactions in relationships within their Sikh or South Asian community. Instead, all cultural embodiments of Sikhism became embodiments of a wider cultural disillusionment and thus object of hatred, manifesting (n = 3) in violence towards the very embodiment of the Sikh religion, a paathee (Sikh priest):

*I lost my religion really. I saw one of the paathhees drink whiskey and I swear I got him by the beard and sorted him out.* (P24)

The subsequent loss of a cultural / ethnic identity, identifiable with marginality, resulted in heightened levels of paranoia, evident in felt ethnicity. Initial awareness of felt-ethnicity arose from childhood awareness of skin colour differences and heightened levels of difference, i.e. inferiority, arising from societal interactions. As a result, participants (n=29) experienced intense levels of cognitive and emotional distress when encountering predominately British White areas, creating a sense of self-exclusion:

*We moved…mainly to a White people’s area… In the pubs I used to go to they were 95% White faces… they were surprised to see an Asian person walk into the pub, and all of a sudden I’d feel like a bad Asian thinking what the fuck am I doing here?* (P19)

An outcome of the participant’s loss of a cultural identity was that the majority (n=21) demonstrated an inability to engage with multiple identities, required to engage in differing cultural / ethnic situations. Participants were also unable to manage their in-group prejudice, resulting in depressive ideas, violent behaviours and adopting a mask of being somebody other than what they might actually be or want to be.

Consumption

McCracken (1986) noted that products were an embodiment of a group’s cultural values, which we identified and analysed through the participant’s consumption of cultural events, non-consumption of tangible products and consumption of alcohol and food. Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004) argued that culturally laden consumption assisted South Asians in Britain in their construction of multiple-identities in engaging with British Whites and South Asians living in Britain. The findings presented next attempt to show that marginality prevented both the participants’ ability to consume and therefore engage with multiple-identity construction and management.

Consumption of cultural events such as the local ‘mela’ (South Asian cultural festivals held throughout Britain) presented participants with behavioural and emotional challenges. Engagement with these festivities was indicative of a wider acknowledgement, acceptance and celebration of both their own cultural and ethnic identity, and their relationship with British ‘White’ society, i.e. acceptance. Participants (n = 22) consumption of their local mela and similar reflected a wider sense of disowning, mocking, ridicule and anger:

*I look forward to the mela…we get pissed [with friends] and have a laugh… a fight.* (P1)

A ‘laugh’ constituted getting excessively drunk and ridiculing other South Asians at the event. This form of ridicule typically took the form of lascivious behaviour culminating in physical violence, i.e. a fight. Antecedents of this behaviour were attributed to participants’ anger at perceiving other South Asians as happy, enjoying themselves typically with their families and appearing to be acculturated and accepted by the British White community. Similar behaviours were also noted in wider British White cultural events, such as Bonfire night.

Other examples of non-engagement in community cultural events, such as weddings and birthdays, reflected similar narratives with participants not being invited to celebrate. This deliberate exclusion from their community only exacerbated the participants’ sense of marginality.

Consumption of products represented a particularly difficult nexus for participants to negotiate. The South Asian community were deemed as being highly consumption conspicuous, using products as a means of signifying and stating ones individual and family’s economic and social status in a post-immigrant multicultural Britain:

*Nobody cares about what you’ve achieved…it’s what you have, own and can buy… they are all [Indians] obsessed with what make of this and that you got.*

Desired products, that participants felt would bestow individual and family honour tended to be high status brands; ones that carried specific cultural messages to the South Asian community, such as Mercedes-Benz (good parenting, wealthy family), Sony (can afford anything they want) and so forth. Yet the participant’s low socio-economic positions inhibited their ability to consume the very possessions that the Indian community perceived as indicative of success. Consequently, the participants viewed non-consumption and ownership as representing their wider sense of failing in life, only reinforcing their own sense of rejection and marginality. Participants in contrast viewed products owned by other South Asians as indicative of their owner’s wider success in their South Asian community and wider acculturation into British White society. Consumption of products appeared then to transcend any specific culturally laden meanings and allowed for certain South Asians a means to engage in life. Products became acculturation vehicles allowing a select group to retain their cultural identities and yet hold a British identity as well, a concept alien to and excluded from the participants. The participants subsequently felt that they had culturally failed both themselves and their families, leading to a further sense of rejection and marginality:

*They make me fucking sick…say one thing and go and do it themselves… they are saying look at us, we’re successful as any White person but never consider yourself to be like them.*

3Pissed’ meaning drunk
Excluded from British White society and their own South Asian community and unable to re-engage through consumption acts owing to their own low socio-economic profiles, resulted in the excessive consumption of alcohol. Hutnik (1991) described marginality as an ethnic minority individual who constructs a social identity rather than a cultural one. For participants (n=32) a chaotic social identity with alcohol at its core was typical, with their responses and self-descriptions tending to become more jolly and uplifted in their memory recall of drinking encounters, where words are filled with a perceived pride, for example:

_I drink like mad-man. They [people he meets in the pub] reckon too. Twenty four pints I got. Do you drink? [Researcher answers]. A few years ago I could get through a crate of whiskey in a weekend._ (P29)

The sense of bravado and pride that participants felt, regarding their alcohol consumption, were often experienced in non cultural / ethnic / racial or religious environments, i.e. a bar. This environment provided participants with a rare opportunity to construct and reinforce a socially construed identity, free from cultural roles and norms and most importantly the paranoia associated with felt ethnicity. Instead, multiple-identities could be constructed around the common purpose of drinking, where an ability to out drink all others bestowed a sense of respect, trust and warmth that they craved from but never received from their own South Asian community or British White society:

_Going to the pub used to be right buzz. Do you know the [names a bar]? To be honest with you it’s a brilliant place to get pissed. I drink alone… for years now._ (P18)

The construction of a social identity around alcohol produced friendship networks (n=28). Yet these friendships lacked the social norms and values of other groups, like the family, and appeared not to be engaged with outside the bar. Participants were unable to contemplate the significance of this, merely viewing friends as someone to drink with:

_Drinking, drinking, drinking it’s been my whole life. I love it. Made friends through it. The twenty seventh person died this week. [Researcher probes]. I know twenty seven people who have died cause of drink in my life. Somehow, I’ve survived, it’s luck._ (P7)

Further exploration of the participants need to drink suggested a psychological mechanism to allow them to cope with acculturation stress, arising from their loss of a cultural identity and their perceived failure to accommodate Indian Punjabi cultural values:

_That’s what makes people go on heavy drinking, to blank their minds, to blank everything up, to blank their minds or their so they don’t want to listen to anything and that’s how they go on drinking._ (P28)

Food represents an important cultural embodiment and means to engage with and retain a cultural identity. Yet for participants, food was neither valued as a cultural commodity nor served any conceivable purpose. Instead food represented an embodiment of wanting to live and engage with life, with participants holding the macabre belief that this would inhibit their encroaching death from excessive drinking:

_Look, a lot of my money actually goes on cigarettes and booze.4 What you can buy is food as well, I know its going be a waste of money if I buy it for a start I know if I did eat it, I am going to vomit. I am going to vomit it’s all going to come back out and secondly if I did buy, I don’t fancy it… I drink to die man._ (P14)

**DISCUSSION**

The premise of this paper was to identify and present an alternative consumer acculturation perspective. The narratives presented suggest that previous acculturation theories may have romanticised ethnic minority identities, either through the positivistic approach of Berry (1992) or the post-modern acculturation identity proposed by Bhatia (2002). Instead, participants demonstrated polarised psychological acculturation outcomes, evident in alternating levels of depression, frustration and suicidal thoughts (Ward and Kennedy, 1993), with behaviours identifiable with structural and familial marginality (Khatib-Chahidi, Hill and Paton, 1998). Participants attempts to conform to British White society had been rejected, an attempt that also ensured their own communities wider scorn. Although these rejections partly reflect Bouris et al.’s (1997) Interactive Acculturation Model, the rejection of both groups represents a previously unforeseen acculturation dimension. A consequence of community rejection, a troubled childhood socialisation and subsequent cultural disengagement suggested a fragmented sense of identity, devoid of any cultural sense of identity. The participant’s unwillingness to engage in culturally laden ethnicity identifiers, such as etiquettes, morality, religion or values (Webster and Faircloth, 1994), therefore perpetuated their loss of a cultural identity. Compounding this loss was the participant’s acceptance of British individualistic and rejection of Indian collectivist cultural values, created an intense internal struggle to understand their role in British White society. Consequently, the socio-cultural environment the participants existed in had created and perpetuated a heightened sense of individual cultural isolation and thus marginality.

Where Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004) acculturation study, the participants were unable to negotiate the conflicting cultural demands of their differing cultural systems, preventing participants from constructing any cultural identity. Therefore, any situational encounter presented personal psychological challenges in confronting participants with their disowned cultural identity, such as religious institutions, or in heightened levels of felt ethnicity, resulting in psychological distress. The ultimate outcome was, rather than participants owning a variety of ‘I’ positions (Bhatia, 2002), a struggle to engage with any position identifiable with any cultural or ethnic value.

The only reported outlet for the participants’ expressions of anger, depression and frustration arising from their cultural detachment, was a socially construed sense of self-identity identifiable with marginality (Hutnik, 1991). For participants, alcohol consumption provided a means to construct a social identity around a bar, whilst offering an escape from the psychological and socio-cultural acculturation anxieties experienced (Ward and Kennedy, 1993). Group membership for participants did not involve curtailing or engaging with cultural or religious values but merely excessive consumption of alcohol. Alcohol consumption provided then social encounters that offered an inherent sense of belonging and being valued, that were not evident elsewhere in their lives.

Where Lindridge, Hogg and Shah (2004) noted that South Asians in Britain used consumption to create multiple identities, thereby allowing them to engage in a multi-cultural society, this was not evident in participants. In contrast, the participants actively

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4 ‘Booze’ a slang term meaning alcohol
disengaged from any consumption they felt had cultural association with British White society or their own communities, therefore disengaging from the earlier noted symbolic cultural system (Keesing, 1974). Although this may have been partially attributed to their socio-economic status and the wider environmental socio-economic positions noted in the methodology section, the participant’s narrative expressed a fundamental rejection of culturally laden symbolic consumption. Marginality, for this sample group, represented the complete and utter rejection of any object, value or individual that represented any culture, replaced with an alcoholic consumption identity. We, therefore, propose that these behaviours be termed ‘consumption cultural non-conformity’ from a consumer-acculturation perspective.

CONTRIBUTIONS

The use of Meamber and Venkatesh’s (2000) ethno-consumerist approach, attempted to address potential western centric aspects of previous consumer acculturation research. Theoretically, this paper adds to current acculturation positivist and macro studies by building into Bhatia’s (2002) post-modern dialogical model of acculturation. The use of marginality as a positivist acculturation category, juxtaposed with Bhatia’s post-modern concept of multiple identities, rather than produce inherent tensions of conflict were shown to compliment each other. The participants, we have argued, devoid of the socialisation skills to engage with these wider power dynamics and ostracised from their own community, instead pursued a policy of non-cultural engagement. This policy reached its climax and ultimate rejection of culture through consumer-acculturation non-engagement with culturally laden consumption. Future research therefore should focus on harder to access and engage with ethnic minority individuals rather than more research friendly ethnic communities or groups.

CONCLUSION

We have showed that unlike previous consumer acculturation studies our sample group of Indian Punjabi Sikh males living in Britain were unable to use culturally laden consumption to engage with the dominant culture. This inability or unwillingness to engage with the wider consumer-acculturation process produced a range of emotions from anger and frustration projected onto the individual self, their family and community, and society.

Future acculturation theories and research should recognise that not all ethnic minority people choose to engage with any ethnic culture and instead be in a complex psychological and social position of cultural disengagement.

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