Power Dynamics in Immigrant Families in Britain and Its Effect on Consumption  
Onyipreye Ekperi, Manchester Business School, UK  
Andrew Lindridge, Open University, UK

This paper explores how culture is used, through consumption, to empower the disenfranchised. Despite the calibre and scope of current literature pertaining to this theme, current research has not fully investigated how marginalised groups use consumption as a means of empowerment. The study investigates how marginalised groups of female immigrants use consumption to empower themselves in a patriarchal home environment. Using in-depth interviews our research examined acts of resistance through consumption we identify how married women consciously use consumption as a form of resistance against culturally construed roles they no longer identify with.

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Onyiprey Worlu, Manchester Business School, UK
Andrew Lindridge, Open University, UK

Research into family networks and how they are constructed and sustained through consumption can be criticised for being inherently western centric and White. Previous studies have tended to focus on key themes such as how individuals influence other family members (Cotte and Wood, 2004), how individuals represent family as aspects of their extended self in terms of consumption (Tian and Belk, 2005), and lastly family member’s influence on consumption (Commuri and Gentry, 2005), to name but a few. Despite calls for more research on gender differences in immigrant populations, relatively few studies have been conducted and those that have been studied have been product specific or based upon impulse buying behaviour (Mitchell and Walsh, 2004). The research argues that the current research into immigration, family and consumption practices are lacking in their discussion of idealised norms that govern gender relations in particular the construction of consumption behaviour and consequently power dynamics between husband and wife. The research will, therefore, address this research gap by providing an insight into how immigrant women, through consumption, use power dynamics to assert identities.

Inman et al. (2007) argued that women appear to hold the key to the familial structure amongst immigrant families. Cultural inhibitions, such as the belief that a woman’s primary role is in the home or that women take second place to men is a widely held belief in most immigrant families (Inman et al., 1999); a belief that may lay in transactional gendered socialisation, and the immigrant and the host society culture (Jayakar, 1994). However, when migrants’ acculturation process is considered, immigrant women may produce a diverse and fluid range of identity (Üstüner and Holt, 2007). This in turn may cause them to begin to challenge their own, ethnic groups, patriarchal cultural values etc. This act of cultural resistance may exist in the miniature of simple, daily activities yet these acts appear to remain relatively unexplored.

One area where cultural resistance may exist is in the cultural inhibition of the woman’s role in the family household, i.e. subservience behaviour to her husband. In particular how women, through engaging with the consumption process may have opportunities to express acts of cultural, consumption orientated resistance. It has been well documented that culture and self-identity plays a significant role in consumption; in particular how cultural values manifest through consumption of products (McCracken, 1986; Foxall and Goldsmith, 1994; Lindridge and Dibb, 2003). As a result, for example, cultural resistance may occur in modifying food choices which were once chosen in line of the husband’s preference then changed in line of the wife’s preference, and so forth. However, research that encompasses acculturation and cultural resistance, within a culturally determined family dynamic are lacking in consumer research.

Methodology

This research will focus on Black Nigerian immigrants living in Britain. The choice of Black Nigerians is partially one of convenience and also because the Black African population, living in the UK, is relatively understudied in comparison with other visible ethnic subgroups (Daley, 1998).

This research used two sample groups consisting of ten first generation Nigerian couples (husband and wife) living in Britain and ten British White couples. Both the sample groups were matched for construct equivalence (in terms of age, religious background and socio-economic status) and recruited, using the snowball method of sampling, from London and Manchester.

Taking a Black feminist paradigm, the research was qualitative in nature and used semi-structured and in-depth interviews. The first stage of the fieldwork consisted of conducting preliminary interviews followed by further in-depth interviews with the wives of each couple. This two-stage interview process, conducted over a period of three months, aimed to explore the world of our female participants. It also allowed us to juxtapose the narratives shared with their husbands to the narratives of their individual interview, allowing us to highlight the antecedents of various acts of cultural resistance.

Complimenting the interviews, participating couples were asked to keep receipts of items consumed. These receipts provided points of discussions, for example items purchased that may have caused conflict or tension. This allowed us to explore wider aspects of our participants’ decision-making and how power dynamics, based on gender roles, were acted out.

Preliminary analysis

Preliminary analysis of the data showed that acts of consumption-orientated resistance were evident for all our participants. British white women and Black Nigerian women tended to show similarity through their career path goals, work/family conflict, gender based mistreatment, friendship and community. Both groups showed resistance through the purchase of items without approval from their
spouse; however they varied by the cost of the product purchased. For example British white women were at times more likely to purchase items that were viewed as capital intensive such as white goods. Whereas Black Nigerian women were more likely to purchase items that were less capital intensive such as food and were highly unlikely to purchase high capital intensive products without consultation with their spouse and their presence in the buying process e.g. the buying of electronics.

However, all our Black Nigerian participants demonstrated varying levels of resistance to what they perceived to be traditional Nigerian, patriarchal values. From a cultural values perspective this manifested through expressing a greater sense of individuality; reflective of their engagements with British White culture. For example, many of the participants exhibited this through personal fashion (e.g. clothes, jewellery, hairstyles and cosmetics) and in some cases spoken language (e.g. the use of British slang). Food purchase and food preparation for the family was also shown to be pivotal in individuality and provided a space in which these immigrant women were also able to exhibit forms of resistance of their traditional cultural and patriarchal values.

Bibliography

Consumer Response to Stereotype Threat Related to Dissociative Groups
Mohammed El Hazzouri, University of Manitoba, Canada
Sergio W Carvalho, University of Manitoba, Canada
Kelley Main, University of Manitoba, Canada

In everyday life, social identity and stereotypes influence how people behave. The literature on stereotype threat (e.g., Steele, Spencer, and Aronson 2002), for instance, argues that stereotype threat occurs whenever a person who highly identifies with a certain domain but belongs to a group that is stereotyped to be incompetent in that domain, becomes aware that he/she might engage in behavior that would confirm the stereotype. Previous research (e.g., Aronson et al. 1999) has shown that people’s academic performance can be significantly impaired by the presence of a stereotype threat. Apparently, the psychological pressure of having to perform well in order to deny the stereotype leads to an opposite outcome—poor performance.

In the consumption setting, it has been found that consumers might be reluctant to use products that send negative cues about themselves (Banister and Hogg 2004) and avoid selecting products that are associated with negative reference groups (White and Dahl 2006). More specifically, recent research suggests that males require an excuse to get involved with female oriented consumption (Argo, Zhu and Dahl 2007).

However, to the best of our knowledge, neither the literature on stereotype threat nor the literature on consumer behaviour has investigated how people react to a stereotype threat when the stereotype domain is related to a dissociative group. The current research that draws on stereotype threat and dissociative groups, examines how consumers respond to situations in which demonstrating competence (ability) in using a product is not desirable since it might associate them with a dissociative group. More specifically, we evaluate how consumers’ performance and enjoyment of using products, and their satisfaction with their own performance are affected when consuming products that are associated with a dissociative group.