Broadening the Scope of Consumer Acculturation Theory

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The study (selectively) revisits 30 years of consumer acculturation theory to trace the conceptual stabilization of identity projects as largely autarkic, acculturation agents as un-reflexive, and single-perspective (i.e. migrant-centric) ethnographic data as exhaustive, and converts their critique into a systemic model of consumer acculturation that focuses on the inter-cultural, dynamic, and market-mediated facets of consumer acculturation which have gained significance with the rise of cultural globalization.

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SPECIAL SESSION
Consumer Acculturation in an Age of Globalization: Critiques, Revisions and Advances
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EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

"“Metacculturation’: Cultural Identity Politics in Greenlandic Food Discourses”
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The majority of previous consumer research on ethnicity focuses on consumer acculturation by consumers who come from one (presumably homogeneous) consumer cultural context and acculturate to another (presumably homogeneous) cultural context (Peñaloza 1994). The present article problematizes the relatively clear-cut dichotomy of home and host culture by exploring food consumption discourses from cooking literature and consumers' narrative in the context of Greenlandic consumers (Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard 2005; Kjeldgaard & Askegaard 2006). We argue that the articulation of ethnic identity through food consumption becomes a master trope of the definition of “Greenlandic”, and that this articulation unfolds in and through a context of historically established (marketplace) mythologies of Danish and Greenlandic culture. Consequently, home as well as host cultures emerge as outcomes of the acculturation processes rather than antecedents thereof. We emphasize that this approach stands in marked contrast to standard assumptions in the acculturation literature, in which home and host are generally seen as antecedents to and not outcomes of the process. We argue that cultural reflexivity that is both a cause and a consequence of this discursive process represents a kind of cultural ‘awakening’. This awakening is produced through the boundary drawing between food cultures; a reflexivity which represents an acculturation to being a carrier of a particular cultural identity. Since this is a second-order acculturation or, we have chosen the neologism ‘metacculturation’ as its denominator. In order to explore the dynamics of metacculturation among Greenlanders, we focus on food cultural consumption as it pertains to the establishment of identity among twenty Greenlandic migrants to Denmark and a sample from two high school classes totalling 12 young consumers in Greenland.

The socially informed perception of space and time appear as two fundamental and interrelated dimensions differentiating consumer experiences in the different cultural contexts. In the Greenlandic perspective, the spatial and temporal differences in social organization between Greenland and the Western world (represented by Denmark) are expressed in terms of a dichotomous distinction between nature and culture, Greenland representing the natural (space and time). These dimensions of nature and culture are reflected in a set of master tropes of a discursive definition and distinction of Greenlandic food culture that we elicit from our primary and secondary data. The close connection between the formulation of a Greenlandic identity and Greenlandic food culture is thus reflected in the data. Furthermore, the role of the cultural tropes ascribed to the colonial power (Denmark), in terms of food as well as more generally, are central for the formulation of a Greenlandic identity, both as a negative mirror image but also as a source for the cultural reflexivity generating the interest in the identity project in the first place. Consequently, the dynamic nature of food discourse shows us that the concept of authenticity can only exist as a perceptual construct on the basis of how a culture views its "self" and Others. In other words, we are witnessing an editing of ‘authentic’ food culture through processes of remembering and forgetting certain elements of the historical constitution of contemporary Greenlandic foodways.

Wilk (1996; 1999) discusses similar processes in his attempts to account for “cultural constructionism” in Belize and the grid of “global structures of common difference” that is containing this construction. But in Wilk’s work, the acculturation processes into the notion of culture are more implicit, since he is focusing on various specific domains of the global structures of common difference, the beauty pageant (Wilk 1996) or the food cultural the creation of “real Belizean food” (Wilk 1999). Wilk, however, stops short of nominating the notion of culture itself a part of the overarching grid of global structures of common difference. Cultural boundaries are expressed, and therefore defined through the global structures, but culture and glocal cultural changes remain the boundary that contains these global structures and their manifest expressions.

Summarizing, the concept of acculturation as it has been used in previous consumer research (Peñaloza 1994, Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard 2005, Holt and Üstüner 2007) as the negotiation of the tension experienced by having two (or more) cultural contexts of identification, becomes problematized when the notion of culture itself becomes a reflexive process (Askegaard, Kjeldgaard & Arnould 2009). Acculturation in this perspective is not just a matter of negotiating the tensions between host, home or ‘third’ cultures but it is also a matter of acculturation into the notion of culture itself. The notions of host and home cultures hence emerge as discursive outcomes of this culture of cultures rather than as building blocks of the acculturation process. We call this acculturation process into cultural reflexivity ‘metacculturation’.

“Consumer Acculturation and Competing, Countervailing Taste Structures”
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Over the years conceptualizations of consumer acculturation processes have moved from the “melting pot” model to a “postassimilationist” perspective Postassimilationist research (Askegaard, Arnould and Kjedgaard 2005; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994) challenged the linear acculturation model and conceptualized consumer acculturation as a dialogical process characterized by ongoing cultural negotiation and “culture swapping” (Oswald 1999). These studies revealed how consumers mix and match resources from the minority and dominant cultures and pursue hybrid identity projects as they integrate into their new environment. Recently, postassimilationist research has come under criticism for its bias toward studying contexts that are characterized by postmodern consumer culture which allows consumers to pursue hybrid identity projects (Üstüner and Holt 2007). Instead, Üstüner and Holt 2007 introduced “dominated consumer acculturation” model to account for the acculturation experiences of consumers in less developed countries. The authors argue that different sociocultural structures produce different patterns of consumer acculturation. In the case of less developed countries, immigrant consumers tend to have little economic, social and cultural capital; host consumer culture tends toward “an orthodox modern form” where tastes are rigidly
defined by the upper social classes; and immigrants’ culture tends to be in conflict with the ideologies of host culture (Ustuner and Holt 2007, 44). As a result, rather than individuated, hybrid modes of acculturation, immigrants collectively construct their identities as consumers either by reterritorializing the minority culture or pursuing the dominant culture as a myth through ritualized consumption. Some, however, may fail to do either and experience “a shattered identity project” (ibid).

Our goal in this research is to contribute to this line of inquiry and further question some of the underlying assumptions in the theories of consumer acculturation. Specifically, we seek to draw attention to the following issue. Existing scholarship conceptualizes the dominant culture that consumers seek to (or fail to) acculturate as singular. Whether the focus is Haitians immigrated to the US, Greenlandic immigrants in Denmark, or peasants moved into urban Turkey, the host culture is characterized by a singular dominant consumer ideology and taste structure. This dominant culture is always in the shape of Western consumer ideology, be it in a localized version. Hence, little is known about how acculturation process unfolds when the host culture is characterized by multiple, co-existing, equally powerful, and competing taste structures and consumption ideologies (e.g., Sandıkçı and Ger 2010). We investigate this question through a qualitative study of Turkish rural to urban migrant women living in squatter dwellings in Istanbul and Ankara.

Similar to other developing countries, rural to urban immigration has been a key feature of Turkish history. Since 1950s, limited availability of non-agricultural work, increasing mechanization of farming, political turmoil, and difficulties in accessing to health and education pushed rural people to the cities. Given the insufficiency of public housing and high levels of unemployment, rural migrants typically settle in squatter houses located at the periphery of the big cities. For the Western urbanites or what Ustuner and Holt (2007) refer to as “Batıcı,” squatter neighborhoods represent stigmatized ghettos and their residents the inferior and even threatening Other. The immigrants’ multi-faceted alterity menaces Batıcı’s Western lifestyle that expresses a localized version of the global consumerist sensibilities coupled with a secular orientation. Western consumer goods and consumption practices, which have penetrated into Turkey after the adoption of neoliberal economic policies in the 1980s, constitute a key aspect of the urban modern middle-class ethos. However, since the 1980s, another global ideology has been increasingly influential in Turkey: Islamism. An important outcome of the Islamist movement has been the emergence of a new Islamist middle class (Sandıkçı and Ger 2010). According to the authors, “this new class owes its existence to the upward mobility and urbanization of the formerly rural, peripheral elites” and “now forms a parallel structure that competes with urban secular elites”. Consumption practices of the Islamist middle class entails a new sense of hybrid aesthetics which is informed by Islamic as well as modern sensitivities.

Our analysis shows that the Islamist habitus provides a new set of resources for rural immigrants to draw from while pursuing their identity projects. Their accounts of migration-consumption experiences and practices suggest that Western secular consumer culture is not the only and dominating ideology that migrants have no choice but acculturate to. While our informants, similar to those of Ustuner and Holt, lack economic, social and cultural capital resources necessary to participate into the “Batıcı” lifestyle, they draw from resources provided by the Islamist habitus and acculturate into an Islamist yet modern urban lifestyle. Their consumption practices reflect pursuit of a hybrid identity project and empowerment through acquisition of new resources provided by the Islamist structure. Overall, our study indicates that host culture may not always be defined by a singular dominant culture and that different forms of hybridity may characterize acculturation processes and consumer identity accomplishments in less developed countries.

“Acculturating Masculinity: Second Generation Turks Becoming Men”

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Previous work on consumer acculturation in the CCT tradition has emphasized the importance of situating consumption phenomena within contextual layers of history, colonial relations, and socioeconomic difference between (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005; Oswald 1999; Peñaloza 1994a) and within nations (Kjeldgaard and Askegaard 2006; Ustünber and Holt 2007). Recent work addressing dimensions of gender has focused on women (Chytkova and Özçaglar-Toulouse 2009). Our work takes as its focus masculinity among second generation (Portes 1996) Turkish men in France. This topic is of particular relevance in the era of globalization. First, unlike the subordinated relations between Mexico (Peñaloza 1994a) and Haiti (Oswald 1999) with the U.S., and for Greenland in relation to Denmark (Askegaard, Arnould, and Kjeldgaard 2005), Turkey has never been colonized, and counts within its history the dominant status of the Ottoman Empire. Further, due to alliances with European nations in WWII, the widespread anti-colonial, anti-Western rhetoric characterizing the Middle East has not been as dominant here. And yet, like other minority groups studied, Turks are a minority in France, forming the largest immigrant group there and in several other nations within the European Union.

The theoretical framework brings together this previous work on consumer acculturation with that on gender and masculinity. Particularly useful is Butler’s (1990) work emphasizing gender performance, as persons enact, reproduce, and challenge gender conventions in ways that transcend binary understandings of gender. Also useful is Connell’s (1995) attention to economic institutions in legitimizing masculine ideals and practices. While drawing from this work, we emphasize the negotiation of gender in consumption as accommodated and reproduced in market cultural institutions (Holt and Thompson 2004).

The research entails on-going ethnographic study of 18 young men between the ages of 18 and 30. Interviews and observations were carried out in areas frequented by the young Turks in the suburbs of Lille and Paris. These suburbs are characterized by a high concentration of Turkish and Northern African minorities, under and unemployment, deindustrialisation and dense population similar to that documented by (Wacquant 2007). Among our research objectives are: 1) documenting ideals, norms, and practices of masculinity; 2) analyzing how the various cultural contexts—at home with their fathers and mothers, with friends and significant others in cafés, at work, dealings with France and Turkey, and various national and transnational media forms and institutions associated with each of these groups—come together in consumption ideals and practices associated with masculinity; and 3) addressing whether such contexts are converging in fashioning consumption ideals and practices favoring the homogenization of masculinity.

Our results derive four themes: becoming a father, not loitering in the street, protecting your honor, and conquering adversity. In articulating these themes, we emphasize a number of creative contradictions in the ways these young men navigate what it is to be a man in drawing upon idealized French fatherhood, relations with their girlfriends and mothers, Turkish history, and rural traditions in differentiating themselves from other minorities and their fathers. This research contributes to postassimilationist understandings of globalization by detailing the ways these young men forge distinc-
In summary, a thus broadened field consumer acculturation theory may benefit from also taking intra- and inter-cultural discourses into (empirical) account that define local, national, and transnational (stereotypical) views about certain cultures, illuminate how consumers translate these meanings into practices of sharing or competing, and, potentially, reveal which discourses and consumption practices (i.e., cuisine, arts) may evoke integrative spirits where segregation prevails.

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