

SYMPOSIA SUMMARY

The Ties That Bind: Transnational Families, Transnational Consumption

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SESSION OVERVIEW

The theme of this year's ACR conference is "Building Bridges." This session explores the theme from the perspective of bridging consumptionscapes across cultures and nations. The focus of this session is transnationalism and the effect on consumption in both an intra- and inter- national context. The three presentations together attempt to explore the impact and the consequences of "intra-national and international cultural interpenetration" per Andreasen (1990, p. 848). Andreasen advocates that with the accelerating rates of immigration, it is the responsibility of consumer researchers, both for advancement of our knowledge and for societal benefit, to attempt to describe and explain both the nature of the cultural interpenetration and the consequences for both the immigrant and the penetrated cultural groups (Andreasen 1990). In this session we focus on families; families who have transcended the limitations of national boundaries, functioning in essence as bi-national units. As the authors examine these transnational families in three different settings and three different contexts, they analyze not only the effects of cultural penetration on consumption within the receiving or host societies, but take into account the impact on the originating or home countries as well.

The first paper examines bi-national households in the U.S., comprising two national combinations: specifically U.S. born spouses married to either Mexican or Filipino immigrants. In this study, bi-national households refer specifically to households with partners from two different countries of origin, where the country of residence is both the host and home country for the immigrant and native spouse respectively. It becomes clear that the intersection of the two cultures in these households exacerbate several of the decision making issues that come to play in any household, and has an impact on the bases of power, decision making influence and consumption preferences of the family unit.

In the second presentation, the authors narrow in on consumption behaviors in families that extend across national borders. The focus is on the flows of consumer products, services and capital which spans the economies of the U.S. and Mexico; the remittances sent by family members working in the U.S. to their families in Mexico. Peñaloza and colleagues explore the transnational consumptionscape of Mexican emigrant workers and their families in Mexico, specifically the manner in which these transmitted resources are consumed in Mexico and the impact on social relations within the family and within the families' wider social networks.

The final paper complements the first two as Üçok and Askegaard study transnational families in Denmark; Turkish immigrants who travel to and fro and have formed a link between their different worlds in Denmark and Turkey. In this paper, these Turco-Danish transmigrant consumers attempt to construct living spaces for themselves in both countries, as they move back and forth between the two cultural contexts. They go beyond the boundaries of nation states, creating in essence a transnational social and consumption space, based on the transference and conversion of economic, social and cultural capital between the two countries.

These three papers combined offer differing theoretical perspectives of the relative influence of capital resources within the family, drawing on Bourdieu's conceptualization of economic, social and cultural capital within a particular realm of consumption—that of the transnational family unit. This session thus provides an excellent cross-national and cross-contextual comparison of the

same phenomenon: examining consumption behavior in families who operate within, between and beyond different cultural frames.

EXTENDED ABSTRACTS

"For Better or For Worse: The Intersection of Cultures in Bi-National Homes"

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The bi-national family unit formed through the marriage of two individuals from different cultural backgrounds, can be seen as a crossroads, an "intersection" between two clearly delineated modes of thinking, patterns of beliefs and social constructs that define the concept of culture. This intersection of cultures is necessarily multidimensional in nature as manifested through the relationships between the spouses, the internal family dynamics, the external relational ties and support networks, and the consumption patterns of the household. Yet, despite the increasing globalization of markets and communication, the trans-national movement of knowledge and people, and the inevitable rise in the number of intermarriages between individuals from different countries and cultural backgrounds, the view of the family in decision making research has been as a homogeneous cultural unit. The culturally heterogeneous household has been virtually ignored by the literature.

Over the past 50 years, research studies in household decision-making have focused on marital roles, exploring the relative influence of gender on decision making roles (Davis 1970; Green and Cunningham 1975; Shuptrine and Samuelson 1976) and the decision-making process (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Putnam and Davidson 1987; Ford, LaTour and Henthorne 1995). Research has shown that the base of conjugal power in a particular household often drives gender differences in marital roles (Wolfe 1959; Blood and Wolfe 1960; Raven, Center and Rodrigues 1975), and that these gender differences have changed and evolved over time, as marital roles have become more egalitarian, with fewer traditional gender divisions (Qualls 1987; Lackman and Lanasa 1993; Belch and Willis 2002). Studies on household decision making have also been conducted in different countries (Davis and Rigaux 1974; Webster 2000), as researchers have discovered that marital roles and the bases of conjugal power differ across cultures and nationalities (Rodman 1967; Rodman 1972; Brown 1979; Green et al 1983; Webster 1994; Ford, LaTour and Henthorne 1995). However, this recognition of the importance of the cultural framework has been limited to the examination of "monocultural" families within a particular cultural context.

This research project addresses that gap in the literature, adding to the knowledge base on household decision-making, through an investigation of the effect of cultural diversity on decision roles, power dynamics and consumption within the bi-national household. This study makes a public policy contribution, adding to our overall understanding of the adaptation patterns of immigrant populations in the U.S. today, an increasingly important consumer segment. This analysis may also help managerial and political decision makers to appreciate some of the dynamics involved in cross-cultural interactions at the most fundamental group level—the level of the family.

The study answers the following key research question: How does cultural diversity within the family affect the decision making roles and bases of conjugal power in the household? Hence, the

purpose of this study is to explore the influence of culture of origin and culture of residence on purchase decision roles, decision influence and consumption within the family unit. This research focuses on bi-national households with partners from different countries of origin, particularly where one partner is an immigrant to, and the other partner is a native of, the U.S. This paper seeks to examine not only who makes the decision, but also the context in which the decisions come to be made, both during the formative and maintenance phases of the household. Thus an additional research question asks: What are the types of decisions that prevail in the formative stages of the household and how do they impact later decisions that support the maintenance of the bi-national household?

Since there are few studies within marketing on the impact of culture on the consumption decisions of monocultural immigrant families (Wallendorf and Reilly 1983; Peñaloza and Gilly 1986; Peñaloza and Gilly 1999; Webster 2000), and little to none on the role of culture within bi-national families, the author takes a discovery-oriented approach to data collection and analysis. The analysis focuses on data derived through short surveys and depth interviews with eighteen spouses. The survey data are mapped using a trio of feasibility triangles, based on the work of Wolfe (1959), Davis and Rigaux (1974) and Putnam and Davidson (1987). The results are then elaborated by the interview data.

Thus, this study makes both a methodological and theoretical contribution to the family decision-making literature. The combination of methods used to collect and analyze the data supports the notion that multimethod research can provide a richer view of the phenomenon of interest. In addition, this study augments the knowledge base in the family decision-making literature through an examination of the power dynamics and consumption decisions in intrinsically diverse households. While the established bases of conjugal power (French and Raven 1959, Raven et al. 1975) are still held as valid within this context, expertise as a source of power, is shown to have different dimensions. Cultural competence as a power base, both as a facet of cultural capital and as an aspect of expert power in family decision making, emerges as an overarching theme. Additionally, decisions relating to vacations, children's schools, and food consumption are seen as both exacerbated and constrained by the often starkly different backgrounds and preferences, and the need to maintain psychological and familial ties with family members in the immigrant spouse's home country. Decisions made in the formative phase of the household, e.g. where to live, also become more salient due to the need to factor in the differing national origins. These early decisions are also seen to have a significant impact on future levels of decision influence in consumption choices. These findings clearly have implications for family-decision making theory, specifically the bases of conjugal power and the dynamics of cultural diversity.

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“Within Families, Beyond Borders: The International Social Structuring of Consumption in Mexico”

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Over 15 years ago Appadurai (1990) characterized disjunctions and difference in the global cultural economy, with consumptionscapes as one of five substantive domains. This work explores the contours of one such transnational consumptionscape, that for Mexican emigrant workers and their families in Mexico. Mexican immigrants number approximately 12 million in the U.S., and collectively sent over 22.9 billion dollars to Mexico in 2006 (London Guardian 2006). Previous work has highlighted push and pull factors motivating Mexican migration, the contours of immigrants' consumption behaviors in the U.S., and its embeddedness in transnational economic, social, and cultural networks (Peñaloza 1994; Rouse 1992). This work brings together work on consumption behavior with work on the postmodern family and on transnational social class in better understanding family consumption in the increasingly global economy.

First, as transnational consumption scholars have noted, most of our foundational consumption knowledge is based on a single national domain, and requires significant conceptual and methodological work to examine transnational consumption phenomena (Üçok 2007; Askegaard et al. 2005; Ger and Belk 1996). In this research we build upon previous work charting the nature and scope of the flows of money, products and services, and people, as they pertain to the nature and impacts of international movements of consumption meanings and values for families that transcend Mexican and U.S. national borders.

Second, we view the family as a coping social structure, and seek to extend previous work theorizing family adaptations in composition and function in relation to changing social, economic, and historical circumstance (Chauncey 2004; Stacey 1990; Zaretsky 1976). Our focus is on members who move from Mexico to the U.S. for better jobs, education, and standard of living, etc., and who retain family ties in Mexico, as we examine their effort, capital, and consumer behavior in making their families work. Thus various consumption technologies are relevant, in the form of internet mediated connections, international financial transfers, shipping and transportation services that foster and/or inhibit emotional, economic, and cultural ties important in maintaining, reuniting, and reinscribing family in the U.S. and Mexico. Such consumption is marked by visits, participation in holidays and other cultural rituals and rites of passage such as weddings, birth, death, and graduation, or when visits are not possible or desirable, by the transmission of currency and/or gifts.

The third leg of our theoretical framework hones in on the recursive nature of consumption and social status (Bourdieu 1984), in exploring how national hierarchies change with such transnational family consumption. Analysis sifts through the malleable versus anchored nature of social distinctions within the nation-state, with attention to how they are affected by consumption that extends across national contexts. Our hope is to extend previous work emphasizing hybrid cultural forms as the result of globalization (Ger and Belk 1996) by mapping their particular patterns and processes. Of particular interest is tracing the impacts of forms of consumption (i.e., products/services, fashions, and ideas) informants associate with the U.S., as they circulate with and against forms of consumption associated with Mexican culture.

Our research design entails depth interviews with ten families living in Mexico that vary in relation to the Mexican emigrant worker, as well as in family composition, social class, age, gender,

and rural/urban residence. Interviews begin with daily life in Mexico, particularly consumption of particular products and services, and then proceed through family, community, and national activities and events. We then inquire about family members working in the U.S., what they do, and how often they communicate and visit, ultimately turning to the types of items and amounts of money they send and its uses and significance to family members and in the community.

We hope to contribute to knowledge of transnational consumption behavior in better understanding how it manifests and operates in families and social class hierarchies that traverses national boundaries.

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“Capital Build-Up and Transfer: The Case of Turco-Danish Transmigrants”

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This research demonstrates how immigrants whose lives stretch between Turkey and Denmark allocate their financial resources between these two countries and the reasons behind these decisions. The point of departure for this investigation is the application of a transmigrant (Basch, Schiller & Blanc 1994) perspective on these immigrant consumers, stressing that they are trying to construct living spaces for themselves in *both* home and host cultures. They

thus differ from other types of migrating populations, e.g. cosmopolitans (Thompson & Tambyah 1999) in that they are generally not free movers in the global ethnoscape (Appadurai 1990) but firmly rooted in life and identity projects in only two cultural contexts, what we could call a home and a host culture using the standard terms of immigration research.

We adopt Bourdieu's (1984) notions of social and cultural capital as our main theoretical construct. In addition to the economic capital, which is central to most classical social and consumer research, Bourdieu integrates two more types of capital, cultural and social (which he also calls symbolic), into his analysis. The economic capital is one's financial assets, the social capital is the social networks and group memberships one has, and the cultural capital is mainly related to the general knowledge associated with arts and style of living that one acquires, usually through the family which one is born into and education acquired through formal institutions and family. He argues that, the 'cultural capital' and 'social capital' are often ignored as their transmission is more disguised than the economic one. To Bourdieu (1984) capital signifies power, and forms of capital can be transformed into one another under certain circumstances. Holt (1998) has demonstrated the usefulness as well as the need for contextualization of Bourdieu's conceptual apparatus for consumer research also outside the French context in which it was created.

Thirty-one informants consisting of families and single persons were studied using interviews, participant observations and photography in multiple sites in Turkey and Denmark. The multi-sited ethnography allowed us to observe the differences in lifestyles of informants in their home and host societies in terms of their economic, social capital and cultural capital. The study focused on economic dispositions, possessions and spending patterns in Denmark and Turkey respectively. Also included were themes on ethnicity and identity, the degree of transmigration present in the lives of the informants and their hopes and expectations of their future.

As indicated by our previously mentioned "transmigrant perspective", the discussion presented in this paper does not claim true for all Turkish immigrants included in the research. It is about a subgroup of the studied informants, with particular investment characteristics. These group of transmigrants, labeled as "myth of returners" in a previous related article by Uçok and Kjeldgaard (2006), tend to divert their investments mainly to Turkey. These investments include land, estate, bank deposits, shares in Turkish companies, and gold coins and jewelry.

The main reasons for investing in Turkey are historical, economical and social. Historically immigrants from Turkey migrated to Europe as guest workers, temporary workers that intended to save money and return to their countries. Initially, their temporary stay in Denmark was the main reason for investing in Turkey. Economically, the discrepancies between the economies of Denmark and Turkey make it attractive to invest in Turkey. While the high taxes supporting the Danish welfare system have been creating incentives for the immigrants to engage in black economic activities and yielding extra income, the Turkish financial system has been making it attractive for them to deposit their remittances in Turkish banks. Socially, the increase in their economic wealth, in other words their economic capital, means the increase in their social capital. Being a landowner and having economic wealth allow them to have a higher social status in their hometowns that they once left as poor peasants.

The economic capital of Turkish immigrants in Denmark is on a par with at least parts of the native Danish population due to a well functioning welfare state that allows a fair income distribution and

equal job opportunities. However, Turkish immigrants often lack social and cultural capital in Denmark that would allow them to better integrate into the Danish society. What they lack in Denmark, they try to compensate in Turkey and they do this through accumulation of economic capital.

Based on our findings, we construct a model illustrating the flow and conversion of economic, social and cultural capital between the Danish and Turkish contexts. One of the main arguments is that economic capital gained in the host cultural context is transferred into social and cultural capital in the cultural context of origin. This flow is throwing new light on acculturation processes as they have been described in the consumer behavior literature (e.g., Peñaloza 1994, Askegaard, Arnould & Kjeldgaard 2005). It also extends the knowledge of the role of consumption for Turkish immigrants' identity construction (Ger & Østergaard 1998).

This model accentuates, how external and self-imposed barriers for capital conversion, especially between economic and social capital, in the host cultural context, lead transmigrants to engage in other kinds of capital transfer oriented towards the home culture, reinforcing the transmigrant character of their lives. The results thereby extend the findings of Ça?lar (1995) from the business market to private consumption sphere. Our results finally have implications for Danish immigration policy, since they point to the role of consumption patterns and capital build-up as central factors in relation to successfulness of political attempts to ensure a better integration of Turkish (and other) immigrants in Danish society.

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