

Abstract

Immigration, globalisation and acculturation are important macro factors that influence the likelihood of meeting, interacting with and marrying someone from another culture. Yet, intercultural households represent an under researched form. Using a relational dialectics analysis, this paper illuminates intercultural enculturation and provides examples of how intercultural interpenetration impacts consumption..

Introduction

Several studies have indicated that immigration, globalisation and acculturation are important macro factors that influence the likelihood of meeting, interacting with and marrying someone from another culture (Alba and Nee, 2003; Berry, 1997; McFadden and Moore, 2001; Qian and Lichter, 2007). Several researchers (Craig and Douglas, 2006; Nakata, 2009; Yaprak 2008) have called for more accounts of the dynamic changes in culture that result from the increasingly frequent and complex interactions between consumers and the people, products and practices from several cultures. This paper seeks to contribute to the evolving literature on how cultural interpenetration (Cross and Gilly, 2013) impacts consumption in the household setting. It responds to calls by several theorists (Luedicke, 2015; Kipnis et al. 2014; Cross and Gilly, 2013; Askegaard and Özçaglar-Toulouse, 2011) for further research on the adjustment of consumer habits and identities when two cultures come into contact. The study focuses on illuminating intercultural enculturation, or the learning that occurs without any deliberate effort on the part of someone to impart that learning (Sam, 2006), within intercultural households.

Intercultural Enculturation

Enculturation was defined by Herskovits (1948) as socialisation to and maintenance of the norms of one’s indigenous culture, including the values, ideas and concepts that are salient for the culture. As used in anthropology, enculturation refers to the implicit or covert aspects of cultural transmission (Berry, 2014; Birman and Addae, 2015). According to Schönplugg and Blitz (2009, p.213), enculturation “aims at developing persons into competent members of a culture including identity, language, rituals and values”. Weinrich (2009) argues that the term enculturation emphasises the agentic individual incorporating cultural elements during socialisation and contrasts this with acculturation, which typically references migrants’ movement towards the adoption of mainstream culture. Weinrich (2009 p.125), argues that acculturation may lead to a relative diminution of the significance of heritage culture whereas the agentic qualities of enculturation “conceptualise the continuing incorporation of cultural elements of any available ethnicity, mainstream or otherwise”. Richins (1994) noted that the meaning of cultural symbols is shaped and reinforced in social interchanges; individuals with similar enculturation experiences tend to have considerable similarity in the meaning they attach to these symbols. Consequently, within an intercultural relationship, exploring shared enculturation experiences within the relational culture helps reveal how consumption tensions might be resolved and provides insights into how co-constructed relational goals shape and stage family experiences (Epp and Price, 2008) in intercultural households. Exploring intercultural enculturation helps overcome one of the problems identified by several researchers of cultural adaptation (Rudmin, 2009; Askegaard et al 2005) – the assumption that the mainstream or receiving culture is monolithic and uniform.

Materials & Methods

This study took place in Ireland, which has become a distinctive new regional space of migration and mobility. In 2016, almost 12% of the population were born outside Ireland (compared to 6 per cent in 2002). The largest group of ‘East-West (European) free movers’ (Favell, 2008) in the immigration boom since 2004 came from Poland. The participant households in this study comprise a Polish free mover and an Irish partner. Fifteen couples participated in the study; they were recruited through personal contacts, acquaintances and, in six cases from subsequent referral by couples themselves. As contemporary families, intercultural or otherwise, often do not conform to traditional conceptualizations of the nuclear family, I sought to develop research sensitive to the broad spectrum of social relationships and differences and included married couples, co-habiting couples (including a same-sex couple) and couples who come from different religious backgrounds.

Since the relational dialectic theory approach (Baxter, 2006, p.140) is defined by the need to reflect multivocality, I used mixed methods to illuminate family consumption (Ekström, 2003). These involved individual interviews, joint interviews and accompanied shopping trips to Polish groceries. Interviews were chosen to give voice to people’s lives and worldviews (Belk, Fischer and Kozinets, 2013) and served to generate narratives for dialectic analysis. An individual interview was conducted with each adult partner using open-ended discussion points (Hill and Somin, 1996); from this, the discussion points for the joint interview were identified. The joint interviews allowed for the production of a jointly constructed narrative as partners interact and negotiate, contradict or support each other in an emergent version (Newholm and Hopkinson, 2009).

Results

Intercultural Dialectic of Empathy – Indifference

The indigenous dialectic of empathy - indifference comes into play as one partner steps outside their cultural frame of reference and attempts to understand the viewpoint of the other. We used Vinton and Harrington’s (1994) distinction between emotional empathy – the ability to be affected by someone’s emotions and expressed empathy – the translation of such feelings into words. Our analysis therefore focuses on how empathy was communicated either explicitly, or sometimes more subtly (observed). In each case, Escalas and Stern’s (2003, p.568) summary of the definitional issues in the “sympathy/empathy contrast” is used as an aid to identify instances of self-other orientation (as opposed to self-other differentiation), where there is merging with the other (rather than just understanding of the other) and where there is a direct rather than indirect attitudinal effect.

Table 1: The Intercultural Dialectic of Empathy – Indifference

| Exemplars of Intercultural Empathy | Exemplars of Intercultural Indifference |
|---|--|
| Like there is similar background ...Ireland was deprived ...very religious ...and I don’t think as a country or as a culture people had a lot of confidence in themselves...I think that’s similar in Poland... (Hugh) | ...there is a bit of a fight if I want to have...well not a fight, but there would be a lot of effort from me ...Killian is just not that interested ...like we paint the eggs ...and I think I did it once or twice...I wouldn’t be surprised in ten years if we wouldn’t do it at all...maybe I will try to organise trip to Poland...so (children) have Easter there... it is not really any loss that we won’t have Easter in Ireland... (Tereska) |
| She had found something in the Polish grocery that she hadn’t had for a long time... and she was so excited about it... I remembered when I was working in New York and I found a bar of Cadburys chocolate and being delighted with myself... (Patrick) | I think my wife would have been a bit disappointed about Easter celebrations here... as she would say people don’t do anything for Easter... I am an atheist now myself, so I don’t get involved in that... (Seamus) |
| She wouldn’t feel the need ...to constantly have the house stocked with Polish stuff, I can see she really likes it when we do have the time to go (to the Polish shop) ...there is definitely a homesickness aspect... that wasn’t totally new to me...(Loman) | For the first two years Hugh was getting the chocolate Easter eggs... eventually he noticed that I didn’t eat them... I am just not that mad about them.... (Cyril) |
| Exemplars of Intercultural Non-indifference | Exemplars of Intercultural Non-Empathy |
| I can understand some of the ingredients that he gets (in the Polish shop) but when I see Polish milk coming through the door it kind of pushes the...(Laughs) and I say to him...really like you know we have the best milk in the world here and butter... (Hugh) |so I do come across Polish friends who are really... critical ...negative even...this Doctor is bad because he is Irish... and I don’t like it...(Gizela) |
| There are things that I won’t eat...siedzic... roll mops, you know the fish? They’re like herrings...I won’t go near that! (James) | There was an old man sitting beside me and he asked why am I here? Why don’t I want to work in my own country? ...and it wasn’t very nice (Rachela) |
| I used to go to the workshop...at weekends ... it was all Polish lads that worked there and I was there every Saturday you know... and you’d go in every Saturday and they’d just blank you...they wouldn’t even acknowledge that you walked in... (Patrick) | I wouldn’t go to the Polish shop...too dear... you see Polish people going...new people or those who can’t get used to Irish products... we go to Tesco... and we buy our Polish cheese and sausages there... (Cela) |
| We had our wedding in Poland... we knew immediately that we wanted to do it... you know the wedding industry here? ...there is this formulaic approach ... and the wedding industry has grown up around it... attendance at an Irish wedding can be tiresome... (Fiachra) | They (Polish shops) don’t encourage Irish people to go in... products they only describe in Polish. They should put information in English... usually (staff) has no English... they should put signs in English as well. (Natia) |

Conclusion

Consumer enculturation has received little attention in the literature, yet as Schiefflin (1990) points out, enculturation is a form of social reciprocity, so in the reciprocal learning revealed in the intercultural relationships explored in our study we see how both partners have experienced and attempt to deal with cultural fracture (Davies and Fitchett, 2010). In the literature, enculturation has often been subsumed within acculturation (Sam, 2006) but theorists have also suggested that there are two orthogonal adaptation processes, in other words, acculturation demonstrates adaptation to the norms of the dominant group, while enculturation reveals what indigenous norms are retained (Kim and Abreu, 2001; Jang et al. 2007). Enculturation acknowledges that in the adaptation process, people may wish to maintain cultural beliefs, values and behaviours. In an intercultural household enculturation will occur through interactions (for example conversations) or observations (for example during shopping or consumption) and is therefore part of cultural socialisation. Using a relational lens, this study reveals how intercultural empathy is an important feature of the couples’ enculturation.

Oswald (1999 p.310) showed how consumption was used to perform what she described as “culture shopping”, which enabled negotiation of the perceived differences between host and home ethnic identities. This study notes the ways in which intercultural couples use their consumption, for example of food and retail institutions to negotiate ethnic boundaries. As ethnicity connects to gender roles within marital interactions (Visconti et al. 2014) our findings therefore add to the literature on the role played by the marital dyad in the liberating or inhibiting of the individual spouse’s personal freedom (Chytikova and Kjeldgaard, 2011; Üstuner and Holt, 2007). This study illuminates some of the ways in which consumption within the intercultural household can satisfy or reproduce ethnic, psychological, cultural or structural boundaries and therefore it also responds to Visconti et al’s (2014) call for researchers to illuminate the role played by consumption in intersectional social relations.

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