



The Globalized Barbie Effect on Cultural Wealth of Communities of Color

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Abstract

This study explores the globalized Barbie Effect by evaluating various existing researches on Barbie phenomenon, from around the world. The model of community cultural wealth by Yosso (2005) is applied as a theoretical guideline for this study. Under the framework of critical race theory this model provides basis of redefining the community cultural wealth of people of color. The present study provides evidences from various published researches that Barbie dolls have been affecting at the level of all of the six aspects of cultural wealth, hence they are serious threats for cultural community wealth of colored people around the globe. Barbie doll imposes a kind of homogenized universal concept of beauty that dissolves the possibilities of cultural differences. Thus, the study finds globalized impact of Barbie phenomenon through review of various online studies based on communities of color and their cultural wealth.

Keywords: *Barbie effect, community, cultural wealth, people of color.*

Introduction:

The study aims at utilizing the model adapted and development by Yosso (2005). She emphasized on wealth as defined in terms of aspects of community and culture. While the west may be wealthy in terms of economic resources yet isolation is its evident outcome. On the other hand, communities of colored people can be considered culturally wealthy on the basis of six types of capitals; aspirational, linguistic, familial, social, navigational and resistant. This study takes this model and attempts to establish the theory that these capitals have been greatly influenced and intervened by globalized toy product Barbie doll; making their cultural capital weakened on all the levels. Barbie as a superficial icon of Western childhood is being criticized. This fantasy is worrying phenomenon embraced by women and children throughout the world (Padmanugraha, 2007). Barbie represents love for shopping lavishly and dressing up with glamorous accessories. This is not only a life style within a specific culture it represents superiority of the perfect beauty ideal features and figure kept in limelight by the dominant fashion industries and the multinationals to be able to sell their goods to consumers around the globe (ibid).

Objectives:

- To discover the effect of Barbie on each aspect of community cultural wealth model
- To cite form the researches indicating cultural issues from the Barbie dolls
- To explore Barbie's role in robbing the colored communities off their cultural wealth

Question:

- Does the Barbie Effect affect colored communities' cultural wealth?

Problem statement:

The community cultural wealth model which indicates that the communities of colored people are culturally rich in comparison to the isolated individuals is under threat. The products which they consume

psychologically and emotionally affect them. Barbie doll is not just a toy product or symbol of a superficial and ostentatious life style for young colored girls. It affects the mindsets of societies around the world.

Significance of the study:

This study is significant as it extends the model of Yosso (2005). It reveals the effect of Barbie at individual, familial, social and communal level. Barbie not only affects the psychology of young girls at individual level it plays a role in robbing the people of color off their cultural capital in various ways. Hence, this study is different from other criticisms on Barbie as it explores its effect on aspects of community cultural wealth.

Literature Review:

Citing from the researches of different cultural communities, the researcher is able to arrange them under six aspects of community cultural wealth.

Effects of Barbie on Community Cultural Wealth Model:

People are marginalized on the basis of their race, color and creed. Traditional theory rejects that knowledge is a mirror of reality and that knowledge has practical implications. On the other hand, Critical Theory considers knowledge as a function to ideology and a tool of critique of social emancipation. So, knowledge becomes social criticism and a tool for social actions. Hence, critical race theory focuses on the issues of the people of color and helps building their knowledge blocks from their own perspectives which are in some cases extremely opposite of what mainstream media and dominant theorists assumes to be their version of truths.

Tara J. Yosso asserted that Critical Race Theory ‘is a framework that can be used to theorize, examine and challenge the way race and racism implicitly and explicitly impact on social structures, practices and discourses’ (Yosso, 2005, p. 70). Bourdieu connected cultural capital (education and language), social capital (networks/connection), and economic capital (money and materials) with their two basic sources family and schooling (Bourdieu & Passeron, 1977) as cited in (Yosso, 2005, p. 76). Building on criticism to the definition of wealth as mere ‘accumulated assets and resources (Oliver & Shapiro, 1995), Yosso (2005) believes that communities of color have distinct sets of historical cultures in their lives and they nurture their cultural wealth in six forms.

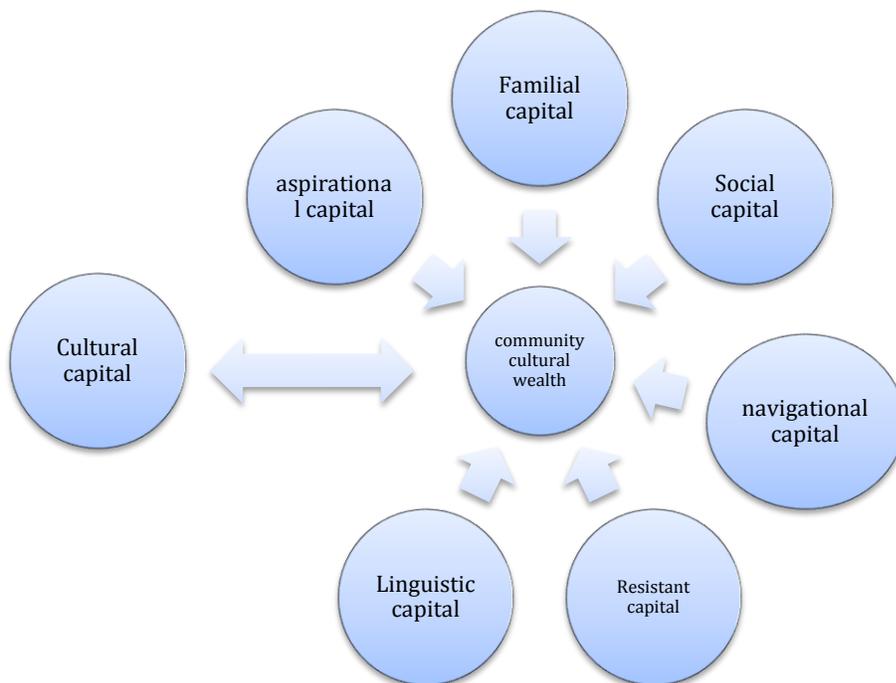


Figure 1 Yosso's (2005) model of community cultural wealth adapted from Oliver and Shapiro (1995).

Six forms of The Community Cultural Wealth:

i) Aspirational capital:

It is required for maintaining the hopes and dreams from one generation to the other. Even in the face of critical circumstances people of color under the dominant cultures of white men, allow themselves and their children to dream on and achieve their goals with optimism. Such hope and dreams allow the children to break the conventional links between parents' occupational status and the academic achievement of their children (Gandara, 1995).

Barbie culture which is 'a universal homogenized ideal of beauty that encapsulates the domination of a Western beauty aesthetic' (Deliovsky, 2008) has caused great influence on this type of cultural capital. Deliovsky's own nine years old daughter wanted to change her curly brown hair into 'normal looking' blonde straight hair the way the 'normal girls' on TV used to have, even when she never bought a Barbie for her daughter, she could idealize it (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 49). While commenting on the traumas caused by white beauty norms, she shows that in cultures where women's physicality is brutally judged and white women are presented as "benchmark women" hegemonic ideology defines "dominated and subordinated femininities" (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 49). Likewise seeing a fairness cream in little tan hands urged the researchers to investigate the Barbie phenomenon in Pakistani urban context (Sohail, Naz, & Malik, 2014, p. 6975). They found that fondness and demand for Barbie among the young girls was, as much as, there was ignorance about its impact among the parents. Hence at a very early age this doll is creating dissatisfaction in the young girls who cannot relate their own selves with the ideal blonde Barbie doll. If Barbie 'allows' girls to dream then it is important to note what sort of dreams, it sows in the minds of the girls around the globe (Hedge, 2001). Barbie exemplifies her ideal figure and physical perfection globally (Wanless, 2001) as cited in (Mukherjee, 2014). These dreams and aspirations of young colored girls to achieve an ideal form of beauty is a huge cause of million dollars fashion and cosmetic industries to mint money.

ii) Linguistics capital:

It includes all those communicational experiences which develop people's intellectual and social skills. This kind of cultural wealth manifests itself in the importance of bilingual's languages and their history of racial culture (Yosso, 2005). The Barbie effect has actually affected this capital of colored people throughout the globe. In Indonesia the concept, meaning and perception of beauty has been greatly influenced through hegemonic global ideals of beauty heavily advertised through media especially in teenage magazines. The study critically examined linguistic texts accepted by young Indonesian people without the least realization of its impacts (Arimbi, 2011). Sohail et al conducted a survey study on Barbie phenomenon and found that Barbie doll is idealized and liked by majority of the school girls. The young girls choose Barbie as their best toy and idealize her dressings and colors wore by this toy fashion icon, all of which is reflected through their verbal expressions (Sohail, Naz, & Malik, 2014).

iii) Familial Capital:

Within a community the kinds of cultural knowledges cultivated and transmitted through extended family ties are called familial capital. Isolation is reduced to a greater extent the people of color are rich in this form of cultural wealth (Yosso, 2005). Beauty perceptions are created in comparison to the "ideals" shaped by peers, members of home and work place and even media (Yuan, 2010). Hence familial capital has also been influenced by Barbie phenomenon. With the passage of time the ideal standards of beauty may also change the minds of families and their preferences for it. In some families, marital ties are preferred to be knotted with the girls who have fairer skin tones. A bride is chosen on the basis of physical appearance matching with the ideal standards of Barbie beauty. Hence, families are formed by considering these parameters of beauty.

iv) Social Capital:

It is a source of instrumental and even emotional support from networks of people within communities (Yosso, 2005). When 'whiteness is a mark of power (Deliovsky, 2008, p. 51)' the social hierarchies prioritize it for

commercial purposes. Wolf's "beauty myth" claims that the white girls' identity depends on her beauty, and she remains vulnerable and dependent on others. They idealize the accepted icons of beauty projected through media in the form of heroines and fashion models. Hence, the commercialist masculine mindset of the mass media shapes the standards of beauty (Wolf, 1990, p. 4). Barbie's stereotype homogeneous, representation associated with fashion industry generates consumers for beauty products and glamorous accessories around the world. Hence communities of colors need to protect their social capital as well. Societies must develop their own sets of knowledges. After being disqualified and excluded from getting access to theorizing space, the people of color should bring in their own approaches and methodologies (Anzaldúa, 1990, p. xxv) as cited in (Yosso, 2005). People having different color and cultural values cannot take Barbie doll as an ideal form of perfect beauty. Even in the communities, where Barbie dolls might appear normal, the impossible to attain Barbie body has caused great physical and mental problems in the minds of young girls (Sohail, Naz, & Malik, 2014).

v) **Navigational Capital:**

It is simply the 'skills of maneuvering through social institutions' (Yosso, 2005, p. 80). These skills allow the people of color to utilize; social and psychological abilities to navigate through hostile places, and even in schools and colleges. People are psychologically influenced by mass media projections of ideal beauty. The Navigational capital is influenced by ideal white beauty concept when the people of color are involved in social practices outside their circles to get prestige associated with having for instance a fair spouse. In Pakistani Television channels the commercials of fairness creams give a clearcut message that the girls who apply fairness creams are more confident, have wider circle of admirers and they do well in professional lives especially in job interviews.

vi) **Resistant capital:**

The behaviors which help challenge inequalities are generated, and backed up with knowledge and skills to resist subordination. Hence the black women put emphasis to raise their daughters as intelligent, brave, beautiful and worthy of respect to counter the social devaluation and belittling of Black women (Ward, 1996) as cited in (Yosso, 2005). On the other in India the trend for Barbie dolls has been promoted. Indian researcher Mukherjee (2014) is of the view that, Barbie with Euro-American body wearing sari which is a traditional Indian dress and a red bindi is at home in India. Barbie's presence in India is significant at the time of their conscious participation in global consumer culture. Barbie dolls nurture the fantasy of the nation and it also generatess the segmentation of Indians as new consumer subjects. The concept of multiculturalism was a tool in the hands of American multinationals for selling goods to people having different consumer cultures (Mukherjee, 2014, p. 292).

Not all the cultures are ready to protect their resistant capital, because there have been many glocalized versions of Barbie which suit their personal interest. For instance, the sari is a famous traditional Indian dress, but it is not a standard form of dress in all the states especially in the south of India. Hence the Barbie wearing sari is used as another standard that imposes its authority to all other local cultural differences found there.

Conclusion:

The study appropriated the model of community cultural wealth, in order to sensitize the consumers of Barbie doll to show, how they are getting affected by them. Yosso established the richness of culture of communities of color. This study focuses on only one toy product, but Barbie has great influence on the minds of the young people through the mass media. Media has far more and greater influences than the familial capital. In fact, the familial mind sets are also affected by what media projects. The dreams and aspirations of young girls are shaped by mainstream media. Their self-image is in many ways, distorted at a young age by the effects of Barbie and Barbie like models. Even when there are indigenous versions of Barbie dolls to cater the needs of different cultural communities, the impossible to attain, extremely thin figure of Barbie can still cause anorexia and Barbie syndrome.

Recommendations:

This community cultural wealth model can be applied to test the effects of various other aspects of white man's cultural domination and invasion. For instance, how far the fast-food culture has affected the people of color.



According to this particular model, it can be an important exploration. A focused study of how far the Barbie effect triggered, and sustained the hegemony of advertisements of fairness creams in Pakistani media can be conducted.

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