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**AUTHOR** Abbott, Susan  
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**ABSTRACT**

The purpose of this study was to distinguish between cultural values and expectations regarding family structure and actual family structure as reflected in interviews concerning family decision making and control of resources in rural Kikuyu where the economy is such that 67 percent of the males must work in Nairobi (Kenya), visiting their homes a few days at a time every 2 or 3 months. Systematically selected, 10 married men and 10 married women were respondents in the initial "ideal" interview. Areas of domain queried were subsistence farming; cash crops; livestock; ownership and disposal of money; property in the form of houses and furniture; and the baptism, schooling, clothing, and discipline of children. The respondents' consensus supported prevalent Kikuyu descriptions of family structure and indicated a clear division between sex roles and areas of control, women being clearly subordinate, making few decisions, and controlling no major source of cash income. However, 4 months later when 58 married women were interviewed in the "real" interview and asked "The last time X was done in your household, who did it?", the male domain decreased significantly with women living in nuclear families exercising more control than those living in extended families. (JC)

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**Full-Time Farmers and Week-End Wives:  
An Analysis of Altering Conjugal Roles**

By

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**Susan Abbott**

**University of Kentucky**

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Criticism is increasingly heard regarding the adequacy of ethnographic description of men's and women's roles in societies. Because much ethnography has been written by men, so the argument goes, it is biased toward males, devaluing females either wittingly or unwittingly. A recent book edited by Rosaldo and Lamphere (1974) responds to these arguments in an exemplary way. Through articles written by women it offers stimulating theories to account for women's position throughout the world. In addition to the topics considered by Rosaldo and Lamphere, it has occurred to this investigator that another source of difficulty is that many ethnographies often present the ideal culture, not actual behavior. When Evans-Pritchard complains in his introduction to The Nuer (1972: 9) that he was forced by the Nuer's refusal to talk with him to rely heavily on observation of actual behavior rather than elicit his data from a few informants we better understand the strength of his work. More often than not, when informants are used, the ideal and actual behaviors become inseparably fused.

By way of contrast, a substantial body of research literature in experimental social psychology and family sociology has concerned itself with measured behaviors of family members. The use of cultural background as an independent variable is exemplified by Strodtbeck (1958), Liu (1966), Haley (1967), and Straus (1968). Comparable behavioral studies that have utilized

personality are exemplified by Berkowitz (1956), Kenkel (1961), and Stabenau, Tupin, Warner, and Pollin (1962). Waxler and Mishler (1970), in their review of these studies, indicate that the mechanisms through which personality affects family structure are not clearly delineated, though the manner in which culture affects family structure is more clearly indicated. It is apparent that cultural membership affects 1) power relationships, 2) rates of communication, and 3) patterns of agreement among family members: it is also evident, however, that the magnitude of difference in cultural values and expectations regarding family structure is much greater than the differences observed in experimental settings. Waxler and Mishler state:

Neither personality nor cultural background of the parents fully explains empirical differences in family structure; instead, the intervening behavioral process must also be accounted for and theory revised so as to represent the statistical interactions between personality/background, behavior, and outcome variables (1970: 263).

In this paper the investigator attempts to take seriously the criticism that sex role differences in every day behavior are less than in idealized culture even though she, like most anthropologists, has worked with husband and wife informants rather than with experimental elicitation. The paper focuses on the discrepancy between cultural values and expectations regarding family structure and actual family structure as reflected in interviews concerning family decision making and control of resources of rural Kikuyu.

## SETTING<sup>1</sup>

The community, located approximately ninety miles northwest of Nairobi, Kenya, like all of Kikuyuland, has experienced major social, cultural, and economic change during the seventy years elapsed since British political control was first established.<sup>2</sup> At the time of the study, the community consisted of forty-two homesteads with a population near four hundred. Approximately two-thirds of the residents belonged to one patrilineage. Most of the remaining one-third were moved into the area during land consolidation carried out by the British during the Mau Mau Emergency in the 1950's. The major and lesser patrilineages observe patrilineal descent and inheritance and strict patrilocal residence. The patrilineal extended homestead is occupied by the head of the family, his spouse or spouses, their unmarried daughters and sons, along with married sons, their wives and children. Each married woman has her own dwelling unit and is assigned a portion of the family land as hers to work. It is that portion of land that her sons inherit. Given the stage a couple has reached in the developmental cycle of the family, one is able to

1. The research on which this paper is based was conducted between October, 1971, and December, 1972, under the auspices of the Child Development Research Unit, University of Nairobi and Harvard University, directed by John W.M. Whiting and Beatrice B. Whiting, with funds provided by Carnegie Corporation.
2. For detailed descriptions of these changes see Abbott, 1974; Kershaw, 1972; and Marris and Somerset, 1971.

predict with fair reliability the form a homestead will assume. Mortality, severe internal conflict, and/or land shortage are the major sources of modification to the basic pattern.

The economy is a combination of subsistence farming, cash cropping, and the wages earned by males in Nairobi about 90 miles away. Due to the absence of the men, the women generally care for the cash crops as well as perform their traditional tasks caring for subsistence crops. Of men, over twenty-one, who are residents of the community, sixty-seven percent work out of the area, and visit their homes just a few days at a time, every two or three months. Dependent upon the necessities of the agricultural cycle, availability of money, and wishes of both parties, a small percentage of the wives travel to the city to visit their husbands. Weisner (1973) describes a "one family, two household" system for the Luhya, another Bantu speaking group that live further from Nairobi. For the Kikuyu, the requirements of tending the European breeds of dairy cattle and cash crops like tea and coffee have reduced the wife's visits.

#### METHODS

The investigator went to the field with some knowledge of the many uses of Blood and Wolfe's (1960) technique for encouraging husbands and wives to report their relative power in family decision making. See for example, Oppong (1970),

Wilkening and Morrison (1963), Burchinal and Bauder (1965), Heer (1962), Olson and Rabunsky (1972), Turk and Bell (1972), and Safilios-Rothschild (1969). While a debt to their techniques is acknowledged, there is a small difference that is crucial to this paper. The investigator saw her respondents twice, once to get their ideal responses; and once again, after she knew them much better, to work out how things are actually done.

#### IDEAL INTERVIEW

The domains dealt with by the questions were subsistence crops; cash crops; livestock; ownership and disposal of money; property in the form of houses and furniture; and the baptism, schooling, clothing, and discipline of children. Ten adult married women and ten adult married men between the ages of nineteen and seventy-five, selected systematically (every tenth name) from lists of all married men and women resident in the community, were interviewed. In the Ideal Interview the questions were phrased "Who should decide X?" Simple frequencies of responses attributed by all respondents to males, females, or joint process by males and females, were determined for each question and then analyzed to identify areas of high consensus, or alternatively areas where little consensus existed.

The interviews clearly support the view of family reflected in the literature describing traditional Kikuyu cultural patterns

and social organization as exemplified in the following quote from Kenyatta:

The father is the supreme ruler of the homestead. He is the owner of practically everything, or in other words, he is the custodian of the family property. He is respected and obeyed by all the members of his family group (1938: 9).

Both men and women agree that males are supposed to dominate the domestic sphere; they are the head of the household and make most decisions in a wide range of domains, as well as control all major sources of income, deciding on its distribution and disposal. Women are viewed as having full control in few areas: what subsistence crops to plant, and disciplining small and school-age daughters. The areas regarded as the joint responsibility of both males and females are baptizing children and deciding when to send a child to school. I think it is safe to say that the processes of decision making and expectations regarding the location of resource control in the Kiyuyu domestic unit are not viewed by either men or women as joint enterprises of the conjugal pair, but rather men and women tend to make sharp distinctions, with few exceptions, between those matters which are the concern of men and those matters which are the concern of women.

In addition to the areas for which high consensus exists, there are certain areas of low consensus between men and women (see Table i). These areas are 1) who control and disposes of minor money from the sale of excess subsistence crops and eggs,

2) chickens, 3) who buys new clothes for the children, and 4) who disciplines young sons and initiated daughters. For most of these areas the men say they are the rightful domain of males, while the women say they are the rightful domain of females.<sup>3</sup>

In summary the patterns of response to the Ideal Interview indicate a very clear division between areas given over to men and those given over to women. There is generally high agreement on the ideal content of conjugal roles, in which women are clearly subordinate, making few decisions in any domain covered, and controlling no major sources of cash income. Those areas which lack consensus each sex claims for themselves. The findings of the interview seem to agree with descriptions of family structure in the literature on Kikuyu.

3. Similar lack of consensus has been reported in other studies concerned with family decision making, and an article by Safilios-Rothchild (1969) reviews their findings. Safilios-Rothchild suggests that 1) such discrepancies might reflect two "realities" (each partner has his or her peculiar set of needs, values, attitudes, and beliefs and these bias their individual perceptions of the on-going decision making process, or 2) the discrepancies may reflect cultural norms about ideal family behavior that affects one spouse consistently more than the other (in light of this suggestion, see Kenkel, 1969). A third possibility to be considered is that in a situation where major social and economic change has occurred in a relatively brief time span, the old cultural expectations no longer seem adequate resulting in disagreement about what should be done. To adequately answer why this discrepancy occurs in this data (as well as others' data), and to meet criticisms of method raised by Safilios-Rothchild, one would have to gather further data.

## REAL INTERVIEW

Four months after the first interview was administered, a second was given, this time in an attempt to elicit what really happens in the community's domestic units. The question was phrased, "The last time X was done in your household, who did it?" The interview was administered to all married women who would agree to be interviewed. Of the seventy women interviewed, only fifty-eight are included in the analysis presented in this paper. The excluded cases were either divorced or widowed women, all of whom occupy the extreme positions at the "high" end of the decision making continuum.

The interview is used in two ways: 1) it is analyzed across questions without regard to individual variation for comparison with the Ideal Interview; and 2) it is later analyzed specifically to establish individual variation and to determine which variables are associated with that variation. Because not all questions are appropriate for all households (for instance some own no chickens or cows) the answers are reduced to proportions male, female, and joint for each response to each question.

Table 1 compares the results of the analysis of the Real Interview with the previous analysis of the Ideal. The domain that males control decreased overall, however, 1) livestock, 2) property, 3) and decisions on how to spend income from major cash crops, remain unchanged, though the males' margin in this regard is slight indeed - only 5.5% more males than females were reported to decide money matters. Ownership of income from cash

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crops, attributed to males in the Ideal Interview, shifted to the category "Joint" in the Real Interview. Fewer than 5% of the males were credited with decisions regarding disposal of minor money from subsistence crops, chickens, and eggs; women make the majority of these decisions. Lastly less than 5% of the males were credited with disciplining any child of either sex.

Domains women control increased to include not only subsistence crops, and the disciplining of small and school-age daughters attributed to them in the Ideal Interview, but also chickens, daily decisions on major cash crops (e.g., when to spray the coffee, how much milk to sell, etc.), as well as ownership and control of minor money from subsistence crops and chickens, disciplining of all children regardless of sex or age, and purchasing children's clothing.

Decisions regarding children's baptism and who should receive schooling remained the same as in the Ideal, attributed to a joint decision process by both the husband and wife. Ownership of cash crop money (which was attributed to males in the Ideal) now is attributed to joint control, which generally meant the family (i.e., parents and children).

When family structure is viewed this way, women represent themselves as controlling more and deciding more than would be predicted from either a knowledge of the literature describing the ideal culture or from reports of ideal expectations. These findings revise the degree to which Waxler and Mishler's assertion

that there is no clear association between cultural expectations about family structure and real family structure (1970: 262) can be accepted. There is both correspondence and lack of correspondence and it is clearly our task to determine whether instances of lack of correspondence are family idiosyncracies or features systematically related to social structural features.

On the basis of the investigator's experience in the community 1) residence of the male head of the household, and 2) phase in the developmental cycle of the homestead<sup>4</sup> were identified as factors that might be expected to affect decision making and control of valuable resources. The Real Interview was rescored to group all women by the decisions and control claimed for herself.

If, as a null assumption, one assumes that there is no relationship between whether the father is working away or at home and the wife's power, Table 2 indicates that this hypothesis can be rejected at less than the .001 level. We must conclude that for the household system to work in the father's absence, authority must be delegated to the wife. That when the husband is gone, the wife makes decisions, seems to make perfect sense. We must however, remember that authority could as well be delegated to the father-in-law or brothers-in-law of these women if they live on extended homesteads. Since this possibility

4. Other variables were tried as well, but none reached acceptable levels of significance. They were economic status of the household, religious affiliation, educational level of the wife.

exists, it must be tested. One way to test this alternate hypothesis is to examine the phase reached by a household in the domestic cycle. Those we can classify as Phase 1 are almost always located on extended homesteads. Table 3 indicates that this hypothesis can also be rejected at less than the .001 level. Neither fathers nor brothers in any significant way take over the decision making functions of their absent relative.

Phase 2 households do not present so clear a picture, though they as well approach an acceptable significance level. Two things seem to be occurring. First, fewer husbands of Phase 2 women work elsewhere. Secondly, there is a tendency for more Phase 2 women to exercise more authority even when their husbands are co-resident, particularly if they live nuclearly. This last statement is not so much supported by Table 3, as it is by an examination of the deviant cases in Table 2. The women who report themselves high decision makers even though co-resident with their husband in four out of five cases are Phase 2 and live on nuclear homesteads. The women who report themselves low are usually Phase 1 and live on extended homesteads.

These findings tend to agree with Raymond T. Smith's (1956) descriptions of British Guianese family structure. Couples begin married life conforming to ideal expectations of roles, but as time progresses, children are born and begin to mature, and all of life's complexities exert their full force, adjustments

must be made. These adjustments in Kikuyuland, like British Guiana, allot women far more authority than ideal expectations give them.

Finally, the intention of this paper is not to excuse ethnographers, male or otherwise, for poor work regarding men's and women's roles in the family context. Rather it is to emphasize the absolute necessity to distinguish clearly between ideal systems and actual behaviors. Consistent application of these distinctions will begin clearing the fog that often obscures our perceptions of roles in family structure.

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TABLE 1  
 Contrast of "Ideal" vs. "Real" for Kikuyu  
 By Domain

"Ideal" Pattern	Index of Consensus	Domain	"Real" Practice	Percentages of Attributed "Real" Behavior*		
				Female	Joint	Male
Male Dominant	95%	Livestock Property	Male Dominant	11.5%	11.5%	21.7%
Male Dominant	77%	Cash Crops	Male Dominant	19.%	13.%	30.%
Male Dominant	90%	1) Decisions to plant and where to plant	Male Dominant	15.%	10.%	55.%
Male Dominant	77%	2) Daily decisions on cash crops	Female Dominant	32.%	8.%	20.%
Male Dominant	74%	Major Income from cash crops	Joint	17.%	30.%	11.%
Male Dominant	90%	1) Ownership	Male Dominant	16.5%	7.5%	22.%
		2) Decides how to spend Minor Income from Subsistence Crops and Chickens				
Male/Female	48%/33%	1) Ownership	Female Dominant	20.%	7.%	2.%
Male/Female	56%/33%	2) Decides how to spend	Female Dominant	20.%	5.%	5.5%
Female Dominant	80%	Subsistence crops	Female Dominant	68.%	21.%	2.%
Female/Joint	45%/38%	Chickens	Female Dominant	22.5%	2.8%	8.5%
Female/Joint	40%/40%	Children	Female Dominant	30.%	4.%	--
Male Dominant	85%	1) Disciplines small sons 2) Disciplines school-age and initiated sons	Female Dominant	35.%	2.5%	5.%

TABLE 2

## Relative Decision Making Power of Wife

Residence of Male Household Head	Low	High	
Works Away	9	18	n = 58 X <sup>2</sup> = 13.4
Co-Resident	26	5	p < .001

TABLE

## Relative Decision Making Power of Wife

Residence of Male Household Head by Phase in Domestic Cycle	Low	High	
Phase 1			
Works Away	6	13	n = 30 X <sup>2</sup> = 9.85
Co-Resident	10	1	p < .001
Phase 2			
Works Away	4	5	n = 28 Fishers Exact = .07
Co-Resident	15	4	

Phase 1: No child yet initiated

Phase 2: At least one child initiated

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"Ideal" Pattern	Index of Consensus	Domain	"Real" Practice	Percentages of Attributed "Real" Behavior*	
				Female	Male
Female Dominant	70%	3) Disciplines small and school-age daughters	Female Dominant	32.5%	4.%
Female/Male	50%/50%	4) Disciplines initiated daughters	Female Dominant	10.%	-----
Female/Joint	50%/40%	5) Buys clothes	Female Dominant	45.%	20.%
Joint	60%	6) Decides which children to go to school	Joint	15.%	30.%
Joint	65%	7) Decides to baptise children	Joint	14.%	32.%

\* These do not add up to 100% because all questions were not always appropriate to each household.

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