An Investigation of Household Decision Making Among Immigrants

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This research questions the adequacy of household decision making models in non-western contexts. The allocation of household resources to extended family members is largely absent in these models. Through an ethnographic study, we demonstrate that for immigrants, longevity in the United States might better explain the dominance in household decision making rather than their gender. Further our research suggests that some decisions might be “sacred” and others “profane” based upon the cultural meanings associated with the acquisition of particular products.

[to cite]:

[url]:
http://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/12805/volumes/v34/NA-34

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Whenever an immigrant crosses the borders of one nation and enters another, they begin a complex adjustment process. This adjustment is oftentimes characterized by conflict otherwise known as acculturative stress (Berry and Annis 1974). Researchers have sought to understand this conflict at both the group and individual levels. At the group and national level, for example, changes frequently occur in social structures, economics and political organizations, while at the individual level changes are of identity, values, attitudes and behaviors (Berry et. al 1992; Williams and Berry 1991). It is apparent that if these stressors are evident at the group and individual levels that they will manifest themselves in the new households that immigrants must reconstitute. Part of this reconstitution of their lives involves the acquisition of a myriad of products. In many cases, there are numerous decisions to be made quickly, such as housing, transportation, work, child care and in all other domains of life. Thus, understanding immigrant adaptation necessitates our understanding of household decision making.

Research on household decision making has examined the roles that husbands and wives play in the consumer decision making process. In general research on spousal decision making has primarily focused on levels of influence between couples in the consumer decision making process (cf. Davis 1970). Other research has examined the impact of sex role orientation in decision making (Qualls 1987). In his research, Qualls (1987, p. 264) noted that research on household decision making primarily focused on: 1) which family member makes the decision; 2) outcomes of household decision behavior and 3) factors that determine which family member makes the decision.” Similar sentiments have been articulated by Webster (1994, p. 321) who noted “there is general consensus in the findings of previous research that traditional role specialization has influenced purchase behavior in three major ways: First, it affects which spouse has dominance with respect to specific products,” (Davis and Rigaux 1974) with males being dominant for such things as automobiles (Green et. al 1983); insurance (Davis and Rigaux 1974) etcetera. Wife dominant decisions are associated with the woman’s role as a homemaker and the products where the wife has been found to be dominant are: appliances (Green et. al 1983) groceries (Davis and Rigaux 1974) and washing machines (Woodside and Motes 1979). Further, Webster (1994, p. 321) noted, “traditional role specialization has been shown to influence relative dominance with respect to product attributes.” Men have been found to be concerned with functional attributes such as price while the women may concentrate on the aesthetic product attributes such as color (Davis 1970). Finally, Webster (1994, p. 321) observed that men have traditionally been dominant in the more important phases of decision making such as the decision to buy, while the women have been more dominant with the minor phases of the decision making such as suggesting the purchase.

Although research on household decision making has made some important contributions, it has primarily examined spousal or household decision making in western nations such as the United States. Researchers have begun to question the adequacy of these models in understanding the spousal decision making processes of individuals from non-western contexts. Webster (2000, p. 1035) noted that spousal decision making is a culturally situated phenomena. Since there are so many different cultures, then it is obvious that models that have been developed primarily for a western context may not hold true when the “deciders” are non-western. In discussing current theories, Webster (2000, p. 1036) states: “the inadequacy of current theoretical bases is even more apparent outside the countries (mainly the United States), in which it was established. In particular, there is evidence that western theories do not fully explain the marital power patterns that can be found in a country such as India.”

According to U.S. census data, the foreign born population represents 10.4% of the U.S. population. Therefore, it is important for researchers to expand their investigations beyond western household decision making. There have been some efforts on the part of researchers to understand household decision making in some non-western contexts. Ethnic identity has been found to be important in household decision making. For instance, Webster (1994) suggested that there was a positive relationship between identification with Hispanic culture and husband dominance in decision making. Further Webster showed that husbands in couples “with a higher identification with their modified patriarchal parent culture have more influence in decision making, p. 328,” and that as the family assimilates, that there is a “shift in marital power away from the husband to the wife, p. 328.” Maldonaldo and Tansuhaj (1999) demonstrated that the immigrant’s ethnic identity and role destabilization influenced their self concept and ultimately their symbolic consumption.

Cross-cultural studies have found that as nations become more developed, household decision making generally becomes less husband dominant (Green et. al 1983). This is an interesting point, because it examines changes in household decision making based on the level of development of a nation. Immigration by definition involves the transplantation of individuals from one cultural context to another. When immigrants originate from less developed countries to more developed countries, they may find themselves facing pressures to become more like their counterparts in the developed country. This, no doubt creates some tensions within the household.

Research by Ganesh (1997) has shown that the decision making of Tamil Indians in the United States falls consistently between that of the US respondents and Indian Tamil households in India, for most of the decision making stages and for most of the products. This research suggested that the immigrants were integrating aspects of American culture into their Indian culture. The acculturation strategy of the U.S. Tamil Indians would be characterized as one of integration.

Berry (1980) defined four different acculturation strategies that an immigrant was likely to adopt, and these strategies are a function of whether the immigrant desires a positive relationship with their culture of origin as well as their culture of immigration. Berry (1980) defined those strategies as a) assimilation; b) integration; c) rejection and d) marginalization. Cross-cultural psychologists have shown that there is strong evidence that supports a positive correlation between an integration strategy and good psychological adaptation during acculturation (cf. Berry and Sam 1997).

Because of the role that consumption plays in our lives, researchers have examined the consumer acculturation of immigrants. Penaloza (1994) developed a comprehensive model of consumer acculturation with research conducted on Mexican immigrants. Oswald (1999) examined culture swapping among Hai-
tian immigrants and Mehta and Belk (1991) looked at the favorite possessions of Indians in India, and Indian immigrants in the United States. There are numerous studies on immigrant acculturation and the examples above serve as illustrations of studies rather than as an exhaustive illumination of research in this field. Even so, it is noteworthy that spousal decision making has largely been absent from these studies.

Gendered patterns of behavior

In every culture there are gendered patterns of behavior. These gendered patterns of behavior are evident in all aspects of life, and consumption activities are not exempt. Therefore, when an immigrant is transplanted from one culture to another, their gendered patterns of behavior might be brought into question. These gendered patterns of behavior will certainly be evident and will be negotiated within the household. The purpose of this research study, therefore, is to examine household decision making among recent Kenyan immigrants. Our central focus within the household is spousal decision making. As noted elsewhere, researchers have already documented that some decisions are husband dominant while others are wife dominant. Therefore, this study examines the underlying reasons why a particular decision may be wife or husband dominant, and the meanings that are attributed to these decisions. Our study is consistent with the views expressed by Webster (2000, p. 1036) who noted that there has been a scarcity of research on “the antecedents or reasons why one spouse is more powerful or has influence than the other in decision making.”

METHOD

The data from this study were undertaken from a larger study of immigrant acculturation. One of the problems with research on spousal decision making is that the interviews or data gathering from one spouse. This has been identified as a weakness by Davis (1976) who recommended interviewing both spouses (separately). Consistent with the recommendations of Davis (1976) husbands and wives were interviewed separately. The interviews of the eight couples were conducted one on one rather than together in order to ensure that the couples would be free to express their own opinion. Whenever possible the interviews were conducted on the same day, in the homes of the couples. All of the interviews were conducted in English and lasted on average one hour. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Six of the couples were married to Kenyans, and they were members of four different Kenyan tribes. The other two couples represented the intermarriage of Kenyans with African Americans. The length of marriages ranged from 2 years to over 20 years. In addition, three of the couples were married in Kenya and had had a household in Kenya. Four of the couples were married in the United States and the households had been formed in the United States. One of the couples got married in Europe, yet their household had been established in the United States.

Although the couples were not observed while making purchase decisions, the field researcher participated in various community events in order to further understand the lived experience of the immigrants. Informants were recruited for the study using the snowball method. The snowball technique affords the researcher maximum variation among the informants on characteristics that are pertinent to the research. Consistent with Wallendorf and Belk (1989), triangulation across sources and researchers was done to ensure the trustworthiness of the data. The integrity of the data collected in interpretive research depends upon the practice of proper interview techniques (Wallendorf and Belk 1989).

In our research we examine immigrant decision making with regards to grocery shopping, first car buying experiences and the influence of the extended family in the allocation of family resources. Although some of these categories have been examined in prior research, this research differs from previous studies because we examine the antecedents (or meanings) of these decisions rather than which spouse is dominant in the decision.

ANALYSIS

The data from the in-depth interviews were analyzed to see whether any themes emerged using the constant comparative method (Glaser and Strauss 1967). In the analysis, themes were identified and coded with key words and then subsequent data was analyzed to identify similar instances of the themes. The emergent themes were further collapsed to reflect the final themes that are presented here. It is important to note that the analysis of the data did not commence after the end of the data collection period. Instead, as themes were identified, they were used to guide future interviews in order to explore similar issues with subsequent informants. This proved to be very helpful since issues discussed by one informant could be explored with subsequent informants. This offered some excellent triangulation of the household decision making since we could compare across households, within households and across spouses. Some selected conclusions were submitted to the informants and in general they concurred with the plausibility of the interpretations (Schouten 1991). The data was analyzed consistent with the suggestions of Spiggle (1994).

FINDINGS

This research reports spousal decision making with regards to grocery shopping, car buying and allocation of household resources to their extended family. In reporting our findings, we rely on the words of the informants to illustrate important points. As such we do not edit the words of the informants since this is their “lived” experience. Our findings suggest that there is role reversal in decision making because of a) prior marketplace experience of the spouse; b) logistical constraints such as lack of access to a car and c) adjusting to the needs of a non-Kenyan spouse.

Role reversal–market place experience

In general, Kenyan men have adjusted to going grocery shopping. It is remarkable that among the couples who had been married in Kenya, there was a distinct pattern of decision making which involved delegating the initial decision making to the spouse with the most U.S. marketplace experience. In all of the cases, the spouses who had previously been married in Kenya, arrived in the United States separately and therefore, gave one of the spouses more experience and expertise in the marketplace. Therefore, at first the spouse who had arrived first was the primary decision maker on major decisions pertaining to the reconstitution of their households. For example, these spouses, made decisions about where to live, what type of car to buy and furnishing for the homes prior to the arrival of their spouses and children. Consequently, the spouse who arrived first had to make decisions with or without expertise and without regard to normal gendered patterns of decision making. Consequently, in the beginning the spouse with longevity in the U.S. is the primary influencer of the household decisions. As result of this pattern of immigration, we document instances of role reversal in the decision making even after their spouses arrive in the United States. When asked to talk about his first car, Mwanza described how he had relied on his wife’s opinion about the best car.
Mwanza: At that time I was, I actually relied on my wife because she had been in the country for some time and I drew from her experience. And when she said [brand] was a good vehicle, I said yes. It was good. Actually, it was a very good car and I had service for a very long time.

What is particularly interesting about this example is that his wife did not have a car when they lived in Kenya and indeed did not even know how to drive. Yet in the United States, she became the expert since she had been in the United States longer. Hence we see evidence of role reversal based on longevity in the United States rather than prior experience with car buying in Kenya. Mwanza had owned several cars when he had lived in Kenya. Kenya is a paternalistic society and therefore, male female relationships are well defined with the male occupying a dominant position (Abbott 1983). So the reliance of the wife in the decision making for a consumer durable such as a car represents changes and adaptation on the part of Mwanza.

Another example of this role reversal is evident from the comments of Mutumia who relies on her husband to recommend needed household items. Mutumia below illustrates the complexity of grocery shopping in her new environment. When asked who goes grocery shopping, Mutumia had the following comments.

Mutumia: When I went for shopping, the first time with him, it was amazing... we needed some things, we needed food,...so I didn’t really struggle much because my husband had already been here four or five months before we came so he knew where we needed to pick things but also I was interested also to know how to pick these things and in which area to get this and this.

Mutumia: Well, like the first time I came it was a real big change because I remember when I got this food and I came into the house and prepared the food, it had a kind of a smell and I asked my husband, um they don’t look fresh I don’t think they are fresh. And then I asked him, mmm, for the time we are going to be here, is this the type of food we are going to be cooking? And he said yes.

Even after the food is prepared, Omariba (mutumia’s husband) remains the expert. Once again, prior experience with the marketplace makes the husband the expert on grocery shopping. This is an interesting development in this household because prior to immigration, Omariba was not involved in grocery shopping.

Mutumia: Well, that is something interesting. Because back in our country sometimes you find that most of the time I was to do my groceries, but here, I can, we both can, me and my husband. Sometimes in case if he is not available, I just go for groceries, in case I am the one who is available, or if he is the one available and I’m not available, he will go for groceries.

Omariba confirmed that he is the one who mainly goes grocery shopping.

Omariba: Well, everybody goes. I go most of the time actually. I cannot really have specific number of times that we go because I could go buy the groceries by the time I come back, I’m told this is not there, go back.

It is worth mentioning that the husband has become dominant in this decision making because of logistical constraints, in this case his wife’s lack of access to a car. At the time that the interview was conducted, Mutumia had recently gotten her own car.

Role Reversal due to American Spouse

In our research we document the fact that Jaramogi (LaTonya’s husband) has moved away from his cultural orientation by becoming the official cook and grocery shopper in his household. This situation would be untenable in a Kenyan context because of cultural norms. It can be noted that perhaps as a result of his marriage to an American woman that the pressures to conform are somewhat lessened by the fact that the American spouse does not have the same notions of gender separation as a Kenyan spouse.

Jaramogi: Surprisingly my wife is not a grocery shopper. She doesn’t even accommodate me so I do most of my grocery shopping. She hates grocery stores. The only thing, she’ll go with me, is because I spend lots of money. I buy anything I come across. She is more a dollar person.

LaTonya: God knew what I needed because I hate being in the kitchen you know but he loves to go grocery shopping, he’ll go and loves cooking and just preparing meals for us but that meat thing, I had to work on it, I’m like baby when you go to the store, you have to buy you know other things and we like a lot of snack food.

LaTonya noted that whenever her husband would go shopping, he would buy a lot of meat and frozen vegetables and no snacks. During the interview she stated that she had managed to convince her husband to buy other things other than meat. Webster (1994, p. 329) noted that research that examines whether some product categories are more culturally sensitive than others will further our knowledge of the U.S. subcultural family in transition. Our findings show that the purchase of meat is indeed very sensitive to cultural practices. More specifically, goats have enormous cultural capital and Jomo Kenyatta (1938) described the importance of goats in ceremonies such as in ascension to manhood and in numerous ways (see for example, Kenyatta 1938, p. 192-193).

Grocery Shopping—Meat Buying

An interesting finding of this research is with regard to the buying of meat. We found that this was a husband dominant decision. However, the acquisition of meat in this instance is not just a simple purchase of needed protein, for the family but is tied to very strong cultural practices. It is strongly tied to their sense of “manhood” and to maintain these cultural practices we found that the acquisition of the goat meat is very ritualized. In general, this acquisition is achieved in one of two ways: a) purchasing the meat from a butchery or b) slaughtering the animal such as a goat for oneself.

Rituals have been found to be comprised of: “(a) episodic string of events; b) a linkage of the episodic event strings in an exact fixed sequence and c) repetition of the event sequence over time (Rook 1983, p. 252)”. We describe the ritual nature of getting goat meat. The immigrants get the goats for specific occasions and these occasions necessitate the acquisition of the goat. Once the occasion is known, the immigrants either call a farmer to slaughter the goat for them, or of course they accompany them in this quest for the goat. In general we found that this ritual of getting goats is a “men only” affair. The final aspect of this ritual involves the consumption of the meat which in most cases occurs with other individuals outside of the nuclear family. According to Hofstede’s (2001) dimensions, Kenyans are collectivistic and there-
fore the conduct of activities in groups is not surprising. This is consistent with practices back in Kenya where a man slaughters a goat and then calls his family and friends to share. Mbithi’s comments illustrate the ritual of slaughtering a goat and sharing with others.

Mbithi: Most times I call my Kenyan people around here, they come and sit here, I either slaughter a goat, we eat with them, or just barbecue, usually barbecue, drink a beer and relax.

When asked how often they get goat meat Mbithi and Jaramogi had the following comments.

Mbithi: Any good occasion or thanks giving or sometimes when I have many people, more than 5 people coming to visit me, I go look for the goat.

Jaramogi: No when I buy a whole goat it is for an occasion when me and my friends decide to do that.

In Kenya, the slaughtering of a goat when there is an important occasion is generally considered important and the person for whom the goat has been slaughtered generally feels very important (Kenyatta 1938). Traditionally only the wealthy men would have been able to provide a goat for friends and family since goats were stocks of wealth. As such the slaughtering of a goat for friends and family sends a message to others about the social standing of the man and is strongly tied to his self-concept as a man. The women value this and the men conform to this as evident by the role that meat has started to play, even in the marriages of Kenyan women to African American men. Wilberforce an African American married to a Kenyan [Imani] noted that he was introduced to goat by Kenyans.

Researcher: So you got introduced to goat by Kenyans?
Wilberforce: Absolutely.
Researcher: Have you barbequed goat yourself at your house?
Wilberforce: I have.
Researcher: Learned how to kill the goat?
Wilberforce: Yeah.

It is interesting to note that the American men who were married to Kenyan women have learned to appreciate the culture associated with “goat” eating and in some cases have learned how to slaughter the goats or figured out where to get the goats. Another respondent, Zawadi who is married to an African American does all of their grocery shopping with the exception of meat. Her husband, mostly buys meat. Zawadi’s husband has had to adjust to her gendered notions of meat purchase.

Researcher: You said you go for groceries. Does your husband go grocery shopping?
Zawadi: He mostly does the meat. He goes to buy the meat because he goes to the butchery. We try not to go together anymore. The first time, the first times when, the first years that we were married, we used to go together but, I guess it was more time consuming going with him.

It was also noted that the men were willing to expend a lot of effort to get goat meat. In many cases they traveled out of town, in some cases close to 75 miles to go and buy the goat. The comments of the informants illustrate the effort that they are willing to expend in order to get the goats.

Mbithi: I get them from [name of town], I got a black farmer an American, black, a black American a friend of mine so I just call him and I tell him, I am coming for a goat, so we go there and he slaughters for us, he cleans it up, I just bring the carcass.

Ideally the immigrants would like to get goat meat from the farms, but when they are not able to slaughter the goat themselves then they go to the international stores such as those described by Jaramogi in order to satisfy their meat needs.

Jaramogi: There are some farm and stores in [name of city] have some. Some Mediterranean stores or African stores and I already know some Mediterranean and Indian stores that already sell them.
Researcher: You also said slaughter a goat
Jaramogi: In Mississippi, Tennessee. they are people that sell goats for a living.

Summary of Goat Acquisition

The acquisition of meat remains “sacred” to these immigrants and they engage in elaborate ritualistic behaviors. Therefore, we see the American male adjusting to the “sacredness” (Belk, Wallendorf and Sherry (1989) of the male buying of meat in order to enable his wife to continue practices common in Kenya. We also see evidence of this with the African American husband who learns how to slaughter and eat goat so that his wife can maintain the “sacredness” of who makes this purchase. So, indeed there are those things that the immigrants hold sacred, and others that are profane, such as going grocery shopping yet, particular consumption objects might be “sacred” such as the meat buying.

Kenyan familial relationships

“For African peoples, the family has a much wider circle of members than the word suggests in Europe or North America. In traditional society, the family includes, children, parents, grandparents, uncles, aunts, brothers and sisters who may have their own children, and other immediate relatives (Mbithi 1969, p. 138). Kenyans tend to stay married for long and divorce is virtually nonexistent. Abbott (1983) noted that in Kenya: “marriages link two patrilineally based families in continuous obligation to each other.” These life long obligations to both sides of the family call for the utilization of household resources in meeting these obligations. The self concept of many Kenyans includes their extended family such as their clan. “What happens to the individual happens to the whole group, and whatever happens to the whole group happens to the individual. The individual can only say: “I am because we are; and since we are, therefore I am, p. 141.” According to Mbithi (1969) this is a cardinal point in understanding the African view of man. This view is crucial in understanding why the Kenyans allocate their household resources to extended family members in Kenya.

Family Resources: Allocation

The allocation of funds to send to Kenya is deeply rooted in the immigrants’ self-concept. Ma and Schoeneman (1997) have correctly noted: “in traditional African cultures, family and kin are the most important aspects of an individual’s life.” The African tribal group conception of self is defined by feelings toward wealth, property, family and position in the community (Mwaniki 1973). Mbithi (1969) asks “what then is the individual and where is his
place in the community? In traditional life the individual does not and cannot exist alone except corporately. He owes his existence to other people, including those of past generations and his contemporaries. He is simply part of the whole.” Similar views were expressed in Facing Mt. Kenya by Jomo Kenyatta (1938) who described: “An individualist is looked upon with suspicion…. He may lack assistance when he needs it. He cannot expect that everything he does will prosper, for the weight of opinion makes him feel his crime against society… in Gikuyu community there is really no individual affair, for everything has a moral and social influence p. 115.” Gikuyus are a Kenyan tribe who are represented in the sample. The comments of Wilberforce highlight this belief in prosperity based on helping others as expressed by his Kenyan father in law.

Wilberforce: He believes the strengths of everything that he has, comes from his assistance to other people. You know kind of like he’s reaping his blessings from being helpful to other people.

As such the society expects those with wealth and prosperity to bring up their family members. In their 2003 study Bonsu and Belk examined cultural versus global capital in Ghana and they noted how Ghanaians who had global economic capital were able to convert this into cultural capital. The same situation is evident here, where the Kenyans send money home in order to increase their (and here we mean “immigrant and his/her family’s) social standing in the community. Research on household decision making has not examined the impact of the extended family on the allocation of family resources. Kenyan families have complicated familial obligations that last for life. As a result the income of the family is distributed among the nuclear family as well as the extended family. This is done through: a) sending money to Kenya to support their parents and siblings; b) paying tuition for their siblings and relevant others; c) the sending of money to family members for sustenance or for self-development and d) sending of physical items. Our research also uncovered differences in the types of things that the different spouses will send to Kenya, and it was found that the women were more likely to send material goods than the men. As the immigrants live longer in the United States they stop buying things to send and rely more on sending money back to Kenya. The comments of Mbithi show the changes that have occurred over time.

Mbithi (Lela’s husband): When we came here, most of our family members that we care about didn’t have enough clothing so when we came here the clothing say you go to garage sales and sometimes you get new clothes which have never been used so every time we used to buy, buy, buy like if you go to my wife’s wardrobe, it is full so at the time, we get a ticket or somebody decides to go home, we just throw the things in a bag and just label them for so and so and then we would carry and then we started changing the technique a little, we found out that every time we would be here, and we are going home, they think we are bringing and that doesn’t help them and so we started saying that we will go home and see somebody who we think has an idea and we ask them, what do you think if you got some money like so much what do you think you can do with that money.”.

Lela(Mbithi’s wife): I just send them money. I send them clothes too. But right now, I’m not so big with the clothes coz I send them and it’s just never enough. And I don’t think I can afford doing that. Sometimes I just think I can send them money.

Sending Things to Kenya

Again as noted above there are gender differences in the types of things being sent to Kenya. The following comments clearly illustrate this.

Mwanza(Nyokabi’s husband): Yeah, we do not send many items, articles. What we do if we want to help is send money. Of course if we travel, for me as a person, I like giving money and letting someone choose what they want to buy. My wife of course would buy items to give which is different. So I do not normally buy articles and items to send. I give money if I want to help someone.

Nyokabi (Mwanza’s wife): When I buy things and I keep them up and when my sisters come here or when I go home, I fill everything that I don’t wear anymore, what I bought on sale, … So if I’m not wearing them, I haven’t worn anything for a year, I put it and take it home.

Immigrants described sending money to help their parents as well as educate their siblings.

Omariba: Well, at least we have parents to help so we do not, fortunately we do not have anybody in school now, but my wife and myself, so all that we do is maybe help the parents and help those who are out of school sometimes.

Kariuki: I just say money that’s what I do. I don’t have any other brothers going to school, everybody is through, we just send money to help out my mama, … but I, mostly it is money.

Zawadi: Both my parents, my mom is retiring in December so, my dad has retired so there is no income for them. So I try and send money every month for them to pay their bills and to help them out.

Pay Tuition for Siblings

Imani: What I do, I pay tuition, I pay fees for most of my family and especially some of them are finishing this year thank God.

Zawadi: I am mostly the one who put my small sister through school. I mostly send money home. When I know they are okay, when I know that everything is okay, then I am okay……so I tend to send money.

CONTRIBUTIONS

This research questions the adequacy of existing models of household decision making in non-western contexts. The allocation of household resources to the sustenance of extended family members is largely absent in these decision making models. Our research highlights the need for research that examines the role of extended families in household decision making. Research on household decision making has primarily been concerned with dominance in decision making within the household. Our research has demonstrated that for immigrants, longevity in the United States might better explain the dominance in household decision making rather than their gender. We illustrate how longevity in the United States has resulted in role reversal in decision making among the immigrants. It is noteworthy that our pre-occupation with gender as one of the primary influencers of household decision making has
resulted in gender attributions to observed household decision making. This research questions the efficacy of these gender attributions. An additional contribution of this research is to suggest that some decisions might be “sacred” and others “profane” based upon the cultural meanings associated with the acquisition of particular products.

CONCLUSION

This research has examined spousal decision making among Kenyan immigrants. We have found that through the process of acculturation, that the immigrants adapt to their new consumption environment. For these immigrants, duration of stay in the United States might better explain dominance in decision making rather than their gender. Further, we found that the purchase of some products such as “meat” have significant cultural meaning. In our research we have found that the immigrants have a strong connection with their family in their home country and as such, their household decision making cannot be understood without examining the allocation of household resources to their extended families. Our study demonstrates that there are deep rooted reasons for supporting the extended family. A February 2006 statement by the Governor of the Central Bank of Kenya indicated that Kenyans in the Diaspora are remitting over 500 million dollars annually (Mulei 2006). Clearly, this research has important implications for marketers as they fine-tune marketing strategies for households. If current U.S. population growth trends prevail, the number of non-western households will continue to increase. Hence, understanding the differences in household decision making processes of western and non-western household will be important for marketers as they fine-tune marketing strategies for households.

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