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Independent Individual Decision-Makers in Household Models and the New Home Economics

| Chapter | First Online: 01 January 2011

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[Household Economic Behaviors](#)

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 Part of the book series: [International Series on Consumer Science](#) ((ISCS))



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Abstract

Much of the recent literature in household economics has been critical of unitary models of household decision-making. Most alternative models currently used are bargaining models and consensual models, including collective models. This paper discusses another alternative: independent individual models of decision-making that do not make any specific assumptions of jointness of decision-making in

households. Unitary models are typically associated with Gary Becker, even though most of Becker's own analyses of the family did not use his unitary model. This is especially the case with the specifically independent individual models presented in his theory of marriage. Decision-making models assuming independent individual household members in the Becker tradition are reminiscent of models of labor markets in which firms and workers are independent decision-makers. As basis for econometric estimations, such models may be preferable to models imposing the structure of a game or a household welfare function.

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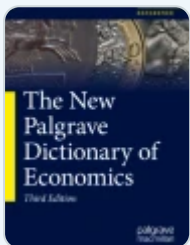
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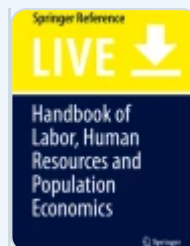
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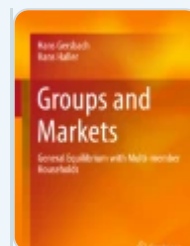
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Notes

1. The term “unitary” was coined by Browning et al. ([1994](#)).
2. References to Becker’s unitary model can be found in articles on a diverse range of applications of household economics, ranging from labor supply – such as Chiappori ([1988](#)), Chiappori et al. ([2002](#)), Chau et al. ([2007](#)) – to fertility (including Tiefenthaler [1999](#); Klawon and Tiefenthaler [2001](#)), care work (e.g., Bergeron [2009](#)), child labor and school attendance – such as Emerson and Souza ([2007](#)) – and demand for pets (see Schwarz et al. [2007](#)).
3. The NHE was called “New” to distinguish applications of household economics based on economic analysis from “Home Economics”, an academic discipline that was then very popular in USA and focused on the training of high school students in practical home management skills, including sewing and woodwork.
4. Note that Becker ([1991](#)) is identical to Becker ([1981](#)) except for a new introduction.
5. Personal recollection of the author while attending Becker’s workshop in the years 1974–1976.
6. See Grossbard-Shechtman ([2001](#)) for more on the history of the NHE.

7. More on these separate models of marriage is found in Grossbard ([2010](#)).
8. See Grossbard-Shechtman ([2003](#)) for models based on that course.
9. More on this topic in Grossbard ([2010](#), forthcoming).

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Acknowledgments

I thank the editor, José Alberto Molina, and Elena Stancanelli for helpful comments on the chapter. Conversations with Barry Chiswick and Michael Grossman - two scholars who were part of the development of the NHE - reinforced my view that unitary models played a minor role in the NHE.

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About this chapter

Cite this chapter

Grossbard, S. (2011). Independent Individual Decision-Makers in Household Models and the New Home Economics. In: Molina, J. (eds) Household Economic Behaviors. International Series on Consumer Science. Springer, New York, NY. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-9431-8_2

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DOI	Published	Publisher Name
https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-4419-9431-8_2	25 July 2011	Springer, New York, NY
Print ISBN	Online ISBN	eBook Packages
978-1-4419-9430-1	978-1-4419-9431-8	Behavioral Science
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