The most valuable of all Capitall; a gender reading of economics texts
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Chapter 7

Revisiting the texts of Becker and Pencavel

7.1 Introduction

Let us now return to the texts we started out with - Becker (1981) and Pencavel (1986) - and see what is gained by using the framework and findings of the former chapters. Becker and Pencavel were shown to be part of a long tradition - one that includes Petty, Smith, Jevons and Marshall - in which the use of a biological concept of gender differences is paramount. Chapter 2 and 3 indicated that both Becker and Pencavel made use of established concepts and theories. Becker was shown to build to an important extent on the rational economic agent, consumer behavior theory, his definition of the standardized economic method, international trade theory, and notions such as specialization, investments in human capital, production, income, substitutability, and complementarity. Pencavel builds on Hicks' economic theory for the definition of his central issue, and further makes use of stylized facts, research, established practices in business cycle theory, standardized labor theory and the definition of scientific research.

To find out in what way use is made of gender notions, these economic texts are here discussed in the historical context of the economic academic tradition and the social and economic environment in which they emerged. In section 7.2 I discuss the contextual setting of these texts, economic science in the USA 1981-1986. Section 7.3. addresses the intertextuality of Becker's Treatise of the Family (1981) and Pencavel's 'Labor Supply of Men: A Survey' (1986) and the references made to the changing academic context. Section 7.4 addresses the contextuality of the two texts. Section 7.5 contains a brief discussion on Becker's enlarged edition of the Treatise of the Family [1991] and the recently published volume of the Handbook of Labor Economics (1999) and section 7.6 gives the conclusions.

7.2 Gender, economics and society in the USA 1981-1986

In considering the social, political, economic and academic context of the economic discipline of the two texts at hand, we should note one of the important changes that has occurred in economic science since the beginning of this century - the transfer of the centre of activity of economic science from the UK to the USA.

In the 1970s and early 1980s the USA was a superpower, still entangled in an uneasy relationship with the USSR. Man and technology were regarded as able to manipulate almost anything, nuclear power and space travel were high on the agenda. Environmental issues, increasing global inequality and the awareness of a broader threat to the natural world were only just emerging. Some perceived Nature as to be under severe threat, others denied these problems or when they were acknowledged, technology and economic growth were considered to be able to solve them. The 1980s witnessed great changes in Eastern Europe and the USSR, leading in the late 1980s to the fall of the Wall and the defeat of the USSR. Inside the US, Reaganomics induced politicians to cut back on social programs and 'the war on drugs' was initiated.

During the period in which Becker was working on the ToF (1981 and 1991) and Pencavel on his LSoM (1986), gender relations in the USA underwent a radical change. After World War II, in which many women worked while their men were away fighting, women were relegated to the household. In the 1960s and 1970s they returned to the labor market in increasing numbers, and their economic position continued to improve, among other things through the policy of affirmative action that pressed firms to hire women: in the 1980s the first women reached the top in business and politics. There were however, also many debates on women's double burden because of the lack of high quality childcare, and it was claimed that women on social programs were having children in order to obtain benefit. On the other hand, the group of young professionals emerged, in which women had their share.

Economic science develops in this period from a heterodox science towards a science dominated by neoclassical and formalist theoretical analysis. Technology defense institutes like the RAND Corporation, where for instance, Arrow and Debreu (1954) and Debreu (1959) among others developed their general equilibrium model, supported this development (Mirowski 1999). Where in other sciences women's studies provided important new questions and insights, economics science remained relatively closed off for these issues. The division between politics and economic science increased. While some economists focused on political activity and acting as an advisor, journalist or policy-oriented researcher, these activities were less and less prominent on the theoretical economists' agenda, if indeed they did not disqualify them from being one. In the 1980s, graduate students considered a sound knowledge of mathematics to be of major importance for a career in economic research, rather than knowledge of the economy (Klamer and Colander 1985). Politics in the US were mainly based on free trade policy, which left little space for political intervention by the government, and thus discouraged the development of theoretical research based on policy research.

With the typology on gender, science and society (see Chapter 4) gives for the USA 1981-1986, we can give the following overview. It is impossible, of course, to characterize both economic science and the USA-society during the years 1981-1986 by a few terms. These terms have to be read as exemplars that refer to broader descriptions given in the texts and in so many publications elsewhere.
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Table V: GENDER, ECONOMIC SCIENCE & SOCIETY, USA 1981-1986

<table>
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7.3 Intertextuality of the texts by Becker and Pencavel

7.3.1 Becker and Pencavel's academic position

To assess the intertextuality of Becker's text and his use of gender notions, it is important to realize that by the time Becker started to work on economic theorizing on the family in the late 1950s and early 1960s, the hard core of neoclassical economic science had been established (Weintraub 1991).

Becker did his graduate studies at Chicago University, where he became an Assistant Professor in 1954. He changed to Columbia University, where he worked with Jacob Mincer. He returned to Chicago to become part of the established and influential Chicago School where he worked with Milton Friedman and became a friend of George Stigler. His research on the family culminated in the Treatise of the Family (1981). He tried 'not only to understand the determinants of divorce, family size, and the like, but also the effects of changes in family composition and structure on inequality and economic growth' (Becker 1992, Hutchison 1992).

He continued to work on these issues, which led to the publication of an expanded edition in 1991. In 1992 he received the Nobel Prize for Economics for 'having extended the domain of microeconomic analysis to

214 Whereas economic science on the one hand was characterized as the analysis of market behavior and exchange relations motivated by self-interest, issues such as income inequality and discrimination that used to be counter-intuitive to economists who believed in the working of perfect markets, required explanation (Becker 1957, 1971). See also Weintraub 1985, Hirschleifer 1985, Becker 1992, Hutchison 1992.

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a wide range of human behavior and interaction, including non-market behavior.\textsuperscript{216}

Becker was in his early years interested both in being useful to society and in mathematics. As he states in his autobiographical notes, he considered sociology too difficult. He was one of the first who was able to start from the then established hard core of the neoclassical economic theory and to apply it to issues formerly regarded as outside the domain of economics. As a young economist he was often fiercely attacked for what a lot of economists considered as going one bridge too far. He faced 'much hostility' as he states in his autobiographical notes.\textsuperscript{217} However, many others followed him in the 1970s and 1980s (Hirschleifer 1985, Becker 1992) and over the years, his position became more and more accepted and established.

While initially three approaches were applied to labor economic issues - the neoclassical, the Keynesian and the institutionalist - the neoclassical approach increasingly included theories on human capital, uncertainty, contracts and unemployment (Hartog & Theeuwes 1989).\textsuperscript{218} The labor market participation of married women (Mincer 1962) and production in the household (Becker 1965) became conceptualized by means of adjustments to the neoclassical framework. Pencavel's chapter, a contribution to the \textit{Handbook of Labor Economics}, which defines the field in neoclassical terms, was part of this development. By the mid-1980s a vast body of literature existed on wages, labor market participation, and education, and on issues such as discrimination, wage differentials, and fertility rates.\textsuperscript{219} The 1970s and 1980s studies on women's labor force participation can be characterized as to apply established economic theory to issues concerning women, and to adjusting rather then fundamentally changing the theoretical tools. In the 1980s conceptual and theoretical critiques were formulated - some of them inspired by feminist theory and women's studies - and applied to questions and problems concerning the specific position of women.

John Pencavel's position in the economic discipline differs in various respects from that of Gary Becker. Pencavel's position in the discipline has been that of a labor economist working at Stanford University and the editor of the influential \textit{Journal of Economic Literature} for many years. He works on labor economics topics addressing men's and women's labor participation and the role of labor unions. He is a fellow of the Econometric Society and a consultant for the World Bank. He is also active in various administrative commissions and is a faculty official at Stanford.\textsuperscript{220} His position as editor of the \textit{Journal of Economic Literature} indicates a central and solid position in the discipline.

The texts by Pencavel and Becker differ substantially in topic, kind and the position taken by the author in the discipline. Where Pencavel's text is a report on applied research and established theory, Becker's text is an exploration of a new field in which new theory is

\textsuperscript{216} Press Release - The Bank of Sweden Prize in Economic Science in Memory of Alfred Nobel. (13 October 1992)

\textsuperscript{217} \url{http://www.nobel.se/laureates/economy-1992-1-autobio.html}

\textsuperscript{218} Before that period the neoclassical economic approach to labor issues was developed in line with Marshall 1890 and Hicks 1946 and Douglas 1934 (Hartog & Theeuwes 1990).


\textsuperscript{220} \url{http://www-econ.stanford.edu/facultv/pencavel.html} and personal correspondence.
developed. Where Pencavel has attained a steady and sound position in the core of the discipline, the position of Becker is that of a creative genius. As we will see later in this chapter, these differences are reflected in the respective manners in which the texts reproduce, (re)define and construct gender.

Becker (1981) and Pencavel (1986) build on and refer to established economic texts and concepts that were not available to the economists discussed in the earlier chapters such as Smith or Jevons. Becker and Pencavel both make extensive use of established economic texts, of established ways to conduct economic research and writing, and of concepts, theories and data produced by economic research to provide a basis and, as we will see, also the limits for their arguments. As in the previous chapters, we discuss here the use of traceable texts, genre and of untraceable texts.

7.3.2 The use of traceable texts

Becker's Treatise of the Family

Becker articulates his theory on the family as one large plausible hypothesis. His use of traceable texts, as indicated earlier (see Chapter 2), is ad hoc and scattered over a wide range of literature and other resources over the last two thousand years. The references to literature and, for instance, to some ornithological facts are provided to confirm, outline and elaborate his statements.

Becker's references to Darwin (1872) and to evolutionary concepts in Chapter 9 provide the reader with more information about the theoretical and social concepts that he applies in the rest of his treatise on the family. Evolutionary concepts of scarcity, competition and success are here linked to competition between males for access to females. At the end of this Chapter 9, Becker discusses the continuity in behavior between humans and other species. He denies that all behaviors can be explained by biology, but concludes that 'the economic approach, however, implies that behavior is continuous because members of all species must allocate scarce resources among competing uses in market and nonmarket situations.' (Becker 1981, 217)

In the elaboration of his theory Becker (1981) refers to Adam Smith's concepts of division of labor and sympathy. He uses the concept of the division of labor and applies it as the specialization of husband and wife in respectively market and household activities. Becker repeats Adam Smith's assertion - inserting a phrase on households - that 'the fundamental source of much of the gain is, as with households, the advantage of specialized investment and the division of labor'. (20, emphasis added, EK) He assumes here applicability of Smith's theorem to households and thus similarity of the theory of the family to trade theory: gains are attained by the use of comparative advantages in endowments in human and physical capital and natural resources. As we have seen in Chapter 5, Smith's concept of the division of labor implicitly presupposed the sexual division of labor in the household. It is this concept of the division of labor (which links market work to men and household work to women), that Becker applies to theorize the division in the household.

221 His references range from the Bible, Plato and Khomeiny to Hume, Viner and Bernard Shaw. For a critique on this point, see Ben-Porath (1982).
Becker also refers to other concepts developed by Adam Smith, such as the 'extent of the market' and 'altruism'. He refers to 'Adam Smith's often cited but misunderstood and seldom used theorem that the division of labor is limited by the extent of the market' and states that the extent of the market for human capital is measured by the time spent at specific activities (Becker 1981, 18). He restates Smith's concept of sympathy as altruism and stresses that he, like Adam Smith, considers altruism - next to self-interested behavior - of importance within a family (Becker 1981, 172). Smith focussed on the moral behavior of men, Becker on the other hand explicitly elaborates the behavior of the husband in the family. Similar to Jevons, who refers to Adam Smith as an early mathematical economist, Becker uses here (like many others before and after him) the broad acknowledgement of Adam Smith's work to provide him with the required basic concepts.

Pencavel's Labor Supply of Men
Where Becker's use of traceable texts is predominantly ad hoc and illustrative of character, Pencavel's text is more empirical and systematic in its use of sources. As this text is based on conducted research, it deals with a vast number of traceable texts.

One special and important traceable text for 'The Labor Supply of Men' is the Handbook of Labor Economics (1986), in which this text appears as the first chapter. Thus The Handbook (edited by Orley Ashenfelter & Richard Layard) sets directly the gender context of Pencavel's chapter: it provides texts that Pencavel can make use of, to refer and delegate topics to. At the same time however, it limits Pencavel's scope for changing and updating current notions of gender, had he wanted to do so.

The Handbook occupies an important position in the range of handbooks that were published on labor economics after research in this field had taken off. The structure of the Handbook is based on a biological concept of gender differences: the ordering of the topics of at least the first four chapters is founded on a biologically based distinction between the behavior of men and women. In the rest of the Handbook the sex/gender distinction is not discussed explicitly except in Chapter 13 on 'The Economic Analysis of Labor Market Discrimination: A Survey' by Glen Cain.

This set up defines the boundaries for Pencavel's discussion of labor supply. It links the base model of the field of labor economics to men's behavior on the labor market. Where Pencavel's chapter contains an outline and explanation of what is described as the 'canonical model' in relation to men's labor supply, the labor supply of women (the topic of the second chapter) is perceived as an issue that 'has important implications for many other phenomena, including marriage, fertility, divorce, the distribution of family earnings and male-female wage differentials'. Killingsworth and Heckman, the authors of this chapter, state that 'the labor supply of women is also of interest because of the technical questions it poses.' (Killingsworth & Heckman 1986: 103)

As we saw in chapter 2 of this thesis, men's labor supply is mainly explained by wages. In the subsequent three chapters the labor supply of women is primarily dealt with as

222 Killingsworth & Heckman for instance, state in Chapter 2 on 'Female Labor Supply': 'We now consider theoretical labor supply models that are or might be used in studying female labor supply. Thus, we do not attempt to discuss comprehensively all important labor supply models: Pencavel (Chapter 1 in this Handbook) provides a most useful treatment of many such models; and in any case our focus is on female labor supply rather than labor supply generally.' (126)
part of family behavior and only in the last instance as affected by increased wages. Killingsworth & Heckman (1986) characterize the difference between men's and married women's labor supply in terms of their labor supply elasticity. These elasticities indicate that women's labor participation is more sensitive to changes in their own wages than men's.

'This argument [the difference in substitution rates between women and men] does not explain why home work is primarily women's work. However, it does at least suggest, albeit informally, why - when that is so - women's labor supply might be more wage-elastic than men's.' (Killingsworth & Heckman 134-5)

In the subsequent chapters by Montgomery & Trussell (Chapter 3 Models of Marital Status and childbearing), and by Gronau (Chapter 4 Home Production - A Survey), the discussion of the economic analyses starts from standard consumer theory and then continues to address the characteristics of women's behavior as special cases. The focus is here on marriage and childbearing, which is related to women's labor supply and household production. The relation between men's behavior and marriage and the number of children is not pursued here. The image of the husband/financial-provider and the wife/care-provider is thus reproduced. Men's behavior is assumed not to be influenced by the state of their personal and family life.

The editors of the Handbook have limited themselves to what is conceived of as established theory: the neoclassical theoretical approach. In this way too, they set the academic context for Pencavel's chapter concerning gender. 'Needless to say all the four chapters we have mentioned embed their analyses, where relevant, in a model of family decision-making.' (xii)

In this context the biologically based distinction between women and men is elaborated and differentiated in the subsequent chapters over a range of issues, Pencavel's chapter being one of them.

223 In the introduction on the applied models on this issue Killingsworth and Heckman state: 'Of course, there is no such thing as a distinct "model of female labor supply" per se: any theory worthy of the name ought to be just as applicable to men's as to women's labor supply. On the other hand, Section 3.1.1. points to a number of phenomena - marriage, the family, the occupational characteristics of labor supply - that seem to be important correlates of women's labor supply, and so are likely to be of particular interest for analyses of the labor supply of women. In analyzing the labor supply of women, it is therefore surely not unreasonable to focus on models that permit more than routine consideration of such factors'. (Killingsworth & Heckman 1986, 126)

224 Here Killingsworth & Heckman add here a footnote: 'There is, however, a technical caveat to this argument. Leisure demand is simply the sum of demands for all different uses of nonmarket time (which, by Hicks' composite commodity theorem, can legitimately be aggregated to form a single composite, leisure, because the price of each use of nonmarket time is the wage rate); but an increase in the elasticity of demand for one component in this composite (e.g. nonmarket work) need not increase the elasticity of demand for the composite (total nonmarket time) itself. (1986, 135)'

225 'Volume I is concerned with the classic topics of labor supply and demand and their impact on the wage structure. These topics have been of interest to social scientists for many centuries, since they bear on two fundamental questions. First, what are the sources of income inequality, and second, what are the disincentive effects of attempts to produce a more equal income distribution? Labor supply is concerned with the incentives, which individuals have to provide labor services, and labor demand is concerned with the incentives which firms have to use them. The more elastic the demand and supply, the greater the efficiency costs of interventionist policies. Thus, a key theme running through many of these chapters is just how big these elasticities are.' (xi)
7.3.3 Use of genre

In the text we find both Becker's and Pencavel's distinct ideas of how economists should conduct research in order to be perceived as an economist. Becker defines the economic approach and applies it to issues and fields that once were regarded by economists as not feasible for this kind of analysis. The family is such a field. Though a central topic in sociology, this field used to be perceived by economists as a black box; as inaccessible to economic analysis because it was considered as being ruled by emotions and love. In doing so Becker (re)defines what the economic genre contains: a simple method consisting of five main propositions that could be, and later on was, applied to almost anything and any field of interest.

Though his position as a Chicago economist with a splendid education supplied Becker with a solid position in the economic discipline from the outset, his endeavors to address these issues initially worked against him. Later on however, it was Becker's account of the family that was seen as 'opening up' the family for economic research. Note that earlier research on this issue, such as, for instance, that conducted by Kyrk and Reid of the Chicago School in the 1930s, never became part of the mainstream.226 Becker pushes neoclassical economic assumptions to their limits. In doing so, he states his identity as an economist and a sociologist at the same time.

With the Treatise on the Family (1981) Becker addresses economists ('it is not written for a lay audience', 1981, x) and other social scientists. This group then still predominantly consists of male scholars, for whom the model Becker proposes is to a large degree self-evident. Rather than on empirical content, theoretical coherence or consistency of newly produced insights, the Treatise leans on the established character of the hard core of neoclassical economics and on the convenient gender explanations it provides.227

Pencavel's text is an internal economic text in the sense that it's target group is economic graduate students and scholars, reporting on progress in a field of economic research. In Pencavel's text genre plays a role, for instance where Pencavel stresses his scientific status - and thus his right to speak - by discussing the epistemological status of this field in Popperian terms. Although Pencavel discusses only one theoretical approach - its content and use - that makes the text primarily an endeavor of applied economics, he refers to the Popperian criteria of scientific research.228 Where William Petty mentioned Bacon's scientific criteria to describe and propagate his own method of research (see Chapter 5), Pencavel mentions Popper's criteria as an accepted way of assessing scientific research conducted by others. Though he describes most economists as not living up to these criteria, this is not a reason to dismiss this

226 On the research conducted on productive consumption in the household as performed by Hazel Kyrk and Margaret Reid see e.g. Feminist Economics, special issue (1996), Susan van Velzen (2001).
227 'It is a convenient, rather than a powerful tool.' (Ben-Porath 1982, 58)
228 Pencavel states in this respect that in this research almost no testing of the applied theoretical models is done. 'So why has the great volume of empirical work involved so little testing of the standard model? I suspect that one reason can be attributed to the fact that not merely are we reluctant to reject a theory until we have a viable substitute close at hand - this is a familiar proposition in the sociology of science - but also we hesitate even to test a theory until an alternative, behavioral, hypothesis is available. The answer "I don't know" is something that an economist will say after being pushed by careful questioning, but he will not readily volunteer this response.' (Pencavel 1986, 5-6).
labor economic research. As Pencavel is not in a position to change the situation, his use of these criteria merely provides his own work with scientific status. It seems to be rather the, lagged, status quo in economic research that explains itself.

7.3.4 The use of culture texts

It is especially in the use of culture texts - broad notions or metaphors accepted by the discipline - that the heritage of gender meanings, more or less redefined by the author himself, come to the fore: main economic concepts carrying implicit gender meanings that are posited by both Becker and Pencavel as unproblematic and value-neutral. Of course, much more research is needed here to indicate exactly how the use of these gender meanings still plays a role and has an impact on the definition and use of economic concepts and theories. Here I shall confine myself to some general remarks and suggestions about the impact on economic theorizing.

Becker's use of economic culture texts contains, among other things, what he refers to as 'the economic approach' and concepts such as 'The Market', 'Labor', 'Income', 'Economic Man', 'Nature' and 'the biological world'.

Becker makes use of culture texts such as markets, which here also include implicit or imaginary markets. Where Marshall (1890) defined the field of economics as addressing and dealing with 'the business life of men', Becker suggests conceptualizing market relations as an aspect of all behavior if not the essence of human and non-human relations. The concept, familiar to economists, of the rational economic agent is assumed to apply, and emotions and love are either assumed away or reduced to self-interest or altruism.

Next to these Becker (1981) uses notions from international trade theory such as specialization, comparative advantage, and more general economic notions such as production, income, substitutability and complementarity, in their original or adjusted definition, to explain the division of labor in the family. Becker thus brings together the neoclassical approach that is linked to the idea of freedom of choice of consumers and producers, and the biological concept of gender. These taken together provide Becker with a theory of the efficient family and explain women's specialization in time spent in the household and that of men in the market as a result of free choice.

Where Jevons relegated moral behavior and relations between people to the realm of the family and perceived them as higher duties, Becker extends or rather complements the concept of utility maximization by the concept of altruism (of the head of the family). Thus he retains the representation of the family by 'the Individual' and, redefining family behavior in economic terms, he approaches this issue within the economic scientific tradition that posits economic science as an a-political and value-neutral endeavor.

In earlier chapters, we have seen how the dualist and hierarchical perception of gender differences formed the basis for the conceptualization of the relationship between 'Man' and 'Nature', a concept that became ingrained in economics. It had an impact on the definition of its logic, the conceptualization of its main actor, the boundaries of the field, etc. Becker places himself explicitly in this long historical scientific tradition, while at the same time redefining and modernizing basic gender symbols. God, for instance, has vanished from the scene. 'Man' is reduced to a behavioral mechanism, and 'Nature' is reduced to either the tiny moment of conception (though with possibly large effects) or perceived as a reflection of the human
world (1981, x) Human behavior is considered to be basically explained in terms of economic regularities that rule out cultural differences. Both nature and gender are derived from the economic approach towards relations and agents; women and nature are only mentioned in so far as they affirm and accommodate the behavior of male agents.

Pencavel starts from economic culture texts, especially from what he identifies as the 'canonical model': Hicks' labor supply model. Canonization takes place here where this book is stated as the authority in the field and provides the labor-leisure opposition that is based on the sexual division of labor in the household.

Another theorem Pencavel refers to, as a culture text, is the exclusion of population issues; the inclusion of issues concerning investment in reproduction and/or human capital. Pencavel thus refrains from discussing men's labor participation in relation to demographic developments and in relation to women's labor market participation. We have to remind ourselves however, that Pencavel does not have the theoretical tools at his disposal, let alone the data (in the 1980s) to discuss the relationship between the increase in women's labor participation and the labor supply of men.

Pencavel does not refer to 'the Individual' as an established concept, but derives this concept from the empiric: from the stylized facts and economic theorizing in the field. Pencavel is able to do this because these data and this research are available. His approach to the material - starting from the data and the research at hand, instead of Becker's more deductive approach - enables him to articulate critical evaluations and to address the theorizing of non-standard situations. At the same time, Pencavel's freedom is limited in various ways: by the character of his chapter as an overview of research, as the first chapter in a neoclassical handbook structured according to sex differences, and as embedded in a well-established theory that assumes hierarchical and asymmetrical gender relations (see Chapter 6 on Jevons and Marshall).

Becker restates the biological concept of gender as the basis for the division of labor between the sexes (Becker 1981, 23-24). He does also address societal discrimination and differences in specialized investment as playing a role in the sexual division of labor in the family. In the years before 1981 however, there were few data on the economic position of women, relatively little research done in the field of Women's Studies and so few elaborated concepts were available to come to a more sophisticated approach to the differences between women and men than just assuming biological differences and comparative advantages. In line with economists such as Smith and Jevons, Becker restated (economic) 'Man' as the unproblematic starting point of his theory.

7.4 - Contextuality of the texts by Becker and Pencavel

7.4.1 Becker's and Pencavel's social and economic position
Gary Becker was born in Pennsylvania in 1930 and grew up during the years that the United States were recovering from the economic crisis of the 1930s. He lived in New York from the age of four and attended elementary and secondary school in Brooklyn. After his


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undergraduate years at Princeton, he went to University of Chicago for his graduate studies, which he completed in 1955. He met Milton Friedman there, who inspired him and taught him that 'economic theory was not a game played by clever academicians, but a powerful tool to analyze the real world.'\(^2\)

After his work as professor at Chicago University from 1954 to 1957, he went to Columbia University and started to conduct research for the NBER. He got married in 1954 and stayed at Columbia University for 12 years. He left for Chicago University, where he obtained a Ford Foundation visiting professorship, after which he became Professor of Economics there in 1970. In 1983 the Sociology Department at Chicago offered him a joint chair with the Economics Department chair he already held, which he was honored to accept. His wife died in 1970, he remarried in 1980. He is currently Professor of Economics and Sociology at the University of Chicago.\(^3\)

John Pencavel was born in 1943 in London, and studied at the University of London in the early 1960s. He moved to Princeton University where he took his Ph.D degree in 1969. He is married and has three children. He obtained a position at Stanford University in the early 1970s where he remains to this day.

### 7.4.2. The use of gender symbolism

When we consider the use of gender symbolism in Becker's and Pencavel's texts, we have to take into account that US policy makers were at the time propagating the idea of free trade. Gary Becker - like Adam Smith, Jevons and Marshall - followed this line of thought. Becker's *Treatise of the Family* (1981) reflects the rationalist optimism of this period, which is inherent to the hard core of neoclassical economics.\(^4\)

The Market has in Becker's perception become the source and decisive instance, which determines value. 'The Market' is not considered as a social and cultural phenomenon, specific to a particular cultural and political context, but is ascribed the status of an entity outside time, thus more or less replacing 'God' (and 'Nature'). This a-political, gender-neutral mechanism also rules the family and is perceived as applicable to all cultures. Where Smith described the division of labor at the market assuming specific gender relations, Becker describes here gender relations assuming specific gender relations on the market. It is this gendered social context that in Becker's text is taken as given and it starts the analysis from there.

Although considerable changes were taking place during these years in social gender symbols in, for instance, movies, Becker was nevertheless orientated towards 'Man'. His perception of 'the American Family' seems to have been formed by current American ideology in the 1950s. Becker was unable to acknowledge the independent agency of the Mother. Although Becker makes the Family visible for economists, he relegates the altruistic feelings and moral considerations to the family. It is men here that are considered to be altruist in the private realm. Wives, as beneficiaries, are limited to self-interested behavior, while at the same time they are limited to the household. Becker theorizes women's agency and their work in terms of those of men, which makes it possible for him to talk about it. The conceptual move thus made however, should not be read as an acknowledgement of men's caring or 'feminine' characteristics, but merely as a restatement of the economic agent as masculine and


\(^{231}\) [http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/bios/becker.html](http://www-hoover.stanford.edu/bios/becker.html)

\(^{232}\) It conceptualizes families and conceives of fertility decisions as results of rational choice (see also Ben-Porath 1982) and it contains an a-historical perception of (human) nature.
as self-interested.

Absent in Becker's account is the advancement of technology: man's increasing control over nature. Although Becker does make a distinction between developed and economically less advanced countries, technology is not perceived as playing a role in the determining division of labor in the household. This is surprising, especially considering the technological optimism and developments going on during the 1960s and 1970s and the important role technology has played in the changing of gender structure.

Pencavel seldom refers to general social symbols such as 'the Family' and 'the Market'. The notion of 'the individual' that Pencavel derives from the data, theories and research in the field of labor economics is coherent with the image of 'American Man' which was prevalent among economists as a norm at that time. It excludes the 'American woman' from the analysis. Though already a little outdated at the time (1986), the image of the American Man, as the head of the household with a spouse that does not do paid work, helps Pencavel to confirm his basic - 'canonical' - model.

7.4.3 The use of established concepts
'Production' and 'income' are social concepts and part of daily language. Becker (1981) however, applies the concepts of 'production' and 'income' in a slightly different way. Women are regarded as 'productive' in the sense of producing children. This concept of production is thus quite distinct from the common economic conceptualization of productivity, especially that of Adam Smith. 'Income' is used to cover both payment for market work and the social valuation of household labor. This use of daily language gives the reader the impression that a concrete and applicable analysis is being conducted, while at the same time the content and meaning of these concepts are subject to change (see Chapter 2, Chapter 6, fn 51). This flexible use of concepts helps Becker to cover a wide range of issues, which would not have been possible with these theoretical concepts.

Becker's texts leans heavily on the public-private distinction, which he applies as if it were a natural boundary, a distinction without any cultural basis. This is strengthened by his idea that people can be biologically oriented to the market or to household activities (1981, 24). The definition of these boundaries as Becker applies them are, of course, very much based in US society and as such only limited extent applicable to countries with other institutional arrangements.

Becker himself made new concepts that became later socially accepted notions. Becker (1964) was the book that proposed the interpretation of education as investment. Investment in human capital as a term becomes broadly used in the US as a conceptualization of education, but not yet of time spent in the household. In Europe, schooling was at the time still seen in terms of 'Bildung'. Only in 1990s did the US-terminology of investment in 'human capital' enter common use socially and politically at this continent.

Becker uses social valuations and established concepts about marriage and divorce as confirmation of his theory as, for instance, in his discussion on the marriage market. His

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233 Gronau (1977) develops such a model.
234 This is of course not the same as the point Becker makes elsewhere, namely that prejudices about gender differences may have the same result as genuine differences would if they existed.

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perception of the differences between rich and poor countries and the treatment of women in these countries are stated in similar terms: his remarks about the pre-historical relations between the sexes are based both on social beliefs and common knowledge. Where William Petty uses science to investigate and dismantle social prejudices by means of numbers and facts, Gary Becker articulates formalizations he considers confirmed when these show similarity with social beliefs (see e.g. Becker 1981, 75). When we consider the social beliefs within the economics discipline, however, his endeavor to discuss family behavior in economic terms went directly against the image of the family as applied by economists. It was thus within the discipline that he countered the social beliefs of his fellow economists with his theorization of the relations in the family.

Pencavel who, like Becker, addresses himself mainly to economic graduate students and scholars, builds on neoclassical economic theory for the definition of his central issue. He applies normative notions where he focuses on the hard-working American, whose labor participation is positively related to his income. These normative notions however, are already ingrained in established economic theory. Pencavel does not refer to them as implicit normative and social notions, but as established economic facts and theory. What is more, other previously social and gendered notions such as productivity, leisure, public – private are taken over as value-neutral, thus also as gender-neutral terms.

7.4.4 The use of gender structure
The gender structure changed along with technological and economic development and the increase in real wages, supported by affirmative action programs and child care arrangements: women increased their participation in the labor market, obtained higher education and pay and reached increasingly higher positions in business and administration. Bergmann (1986) describes a radical shift in the demographic characteristics of the US population away from the traditional family towards a more diverse pattern, with women and men spending less time married and more people living alone. This was true not only of young women and men but also of a greater number of elderly women than before or just after the War. In 1985 the labor participation of mothers had increased to 71%, of which 76% had children under three (Bergmann 1986, 24). Women's levels of schooling increased substantially. Initially the wage gap between women and men remained constant until this changed in the early 1990s (Polachek 1995). However, while the numbers of women students almost equaled those of men in 1982 (Bergmann 1986, 49), academic appointments in the 1980s, especially in economics, still largely went to men. Around the 1970s 11% of employed economists in the US were women, while at the universities this number was below 5% (Ferber & Teiman 1981, 126). Economic science lagged behind: in 1982 there were still only 14% assistant women professors, 5% associate women professors and 3% full professors against 7% women in all ranks.

It is against this background that Becker's perceives 'the Market' as the source and determiner of value and social policies as disturbances of economic 'laws'. These natural
laws\textsuperscript{237} can be revealed by scientific analysis. Variance in political arrangements, ideologies and cultural settings occur in Becker (1981) as variance in taxation, subsidies and public expenditure regimes (see e.g. Becker 1981, 152). Social movements, such as the women's rights movement, are regarded as a result of economic forces rather than as an initiator of social change (see e.g. Becker 1981, 39-40, 251) and political arrangements, such as 'the welfare state' are seen as disturbances of economic efficiency (Becker 1981, 251-255). Variance in peoples' social and economic positions, conceptualized as variance of income, is considered as to be determined by endowments (knowledge, skills, and goals provided by their family environment), genetically determined by race and other characteristics, and luck. Successful (i.e. high quality) children are perceived as to be those children that earn high incomes in their later life (Becker 1981, 164). This conceptualization of economic efficiency in terms of income and of having successful children\textsuperscript{238} posits the perception of the husband as the head and provider of the family as a naturalized and value-free concept, rather than as an entity that is defined in a specific (i.e. American) setting and/or a description from a specific (i.e. masculine) perspective.

Economic structures, rules and implicit subsidies are not addressed as possible causes of the increase in the number of women on the labor market.\textsuperscript{239} The increase in labor force participation by women is explained by increased wages, due to economic growth in the United States. Becker sees the increase in women's labor market participation as a major cause of low fertility, divorce, single-headed households and illegitimacy (see Chapter 2). He describes the changes in gender structure predominantly in negative terms, from a masculine perspective. Efficiency gains through, for instance, abolishing the repression of women by men are not assessed. In line with this, the decrease in dependence of elderly parents on their children (mostly women) is mainly regarded as loss of control of the parent(s) over their children's behavior\textsuperscript{240} and not as an increase in freedom of choice for children and parents.

In this context Pencavel (1986) continues to refer to hierarchical and asymmetrical gender relations in the family. Although he addresses the theorizing on households in which both partners participate in the labor market, these are dealt with as special cases, as exceptions. The Handbook as a whole is conservative in its design. Besides, it contains no contribution from a woman economist, it posits gender relations as a universal and a-historic phenomenon, while it expresses a somewhat outdated perception of gender relations.

\textsuperscript{237} As for instance where he discusses the status of the law of negatively sloped demand curves. 'This law has been extremely important in practical applications and is one of the most significant and universal laws in the social sciences, even though it results more from limited resources than from utility maximization (Becker 1981, 5).'

\textsuperscript{238} Compare Marshall (1890) on this.

\textsuperscript{239} Hanan posits the role of culture and institutional arrangements in Becker's theories as both understated and overstated; understated since the independent effect of institutional arrangements on the family are denied and overstated because the social structures are not analysed for their driving forces. Hanan stresses the importance of theorizing on the interaction of individuals and institutional arrangements: 'Of course Becker cannot be faulted for failing to achieve such a synthesis. My concern is that he fails to acknowledge its need, much less attempt it.' (Hanan 1982, 70-71).

\textsuperscript{240} 'If parents spend less on children because the state spends more, selfish children have less incentive to consider the effects of their behavior on the welfare of altruistic parents - a decline in parental welfare cannot harm the children as much. Selfish children then would have less incentive to reduce or withdraw financial and other support.' (Becker 1981, 252)
Pencavel does indicate a relationship between the growth in the female labor supply and a decline in the male labor supply in the long run. Although he indicates a relation between the increase in women's labor participation, he concentrates on the short term, and does not pursue the relationship between women's and men's labor participation any further. Whereas it is common practice to discuss women's labor supply in relation to that of men, Pencavel only briefly mentions the inverse relation here.

Pencavel's use of data from the US and the UK presupposes specifically Anglo-Saxon political and social institutions, including gender relations in the family. Although he recognizes this, his abstract model is based on these data, which not only affirm this model but also render invisible the social changes going on in the direction of a new organization of gender relations.

7.4.5 The use of gender identity

As indicated above, and as is probably well known to the reader, sex roles and gender identities underwent considerable changes in the 1960s and 1970s (e.g. Hite report 1977). Until then the general opinion was that women were dependent and passive in their sexual behavior and that their role as primary caregivers largely determined their identity. Masculine identity was conceived of as being largely based on the role of the wage earner supporting a family. In the 1980s gender roles changed and became less rigid, while the perception that identity was changeable and to a large extent a matter of choice gained ground. Acceptance of an active sexual role for women grew (Hite 1994). In the US women's subordinate position lost legitimacy, partly as a result of affirmative action and policies against sexual harassment.

Though socially the changes in gender relations in the last few decades have meant a decrease in the importance of one's sex for one's life course, Becker (1981) restates gender identity as the most important feature of an individual. It is the sex of a person that determines the kind of activities one does and what one's time is worth. In addition, Becker explains the fact that the amount of household work remains more or less constant, even though the number of children per family is declining by an ad hoc hypothesis, namely an increase of the quality of children. Becker reproduces here Marshall's approach that stresses the importance of mothers' contribution to children's endowments. New is his hypothesis of men's increasing interest in the care for children, this being men's contribution to quality. Although changes in gender roles and the division of labor between women and men remain to be defined in terms of, and reduced to, sex difference, Becker acknowledges the possibility of other divisions of labor inside and outside the family, though without conceptualizing this any further.

Pencavel's American male individuals are perceived to be fully available for the labor market and their behavior on the labor market is supposed to be influenced only by pay. However, in his conclusions Pencavel himself states that 'the focus of most economists' research has been on behavioral responses that for men appear to be of a relatively small order of magnitude' and stresses that 'we need to know more about what this "unobserved heterogeneity" represents. [...] Pencavel closes his chapter off with the remarks, 'Are these differences [...] attributable to attitudes and values that seem to be acquired by parents? There is a great deal we do not know and that is waiting to be discovered.' (Pencavel 1986, 95)
7.5 Becker's enlarged edition and a new volume of the Handbook of Labor Economics: opportunities seized or chances missed?

Since 1985 there has been a considerable growth in the literature analyzing the interactions between the labor supply of spouses (e.g. Manser & Brown 1979, McElroy & Horney 1981, Kooreman & Kapteyn 1987, Ott 1992, Lundberg & Pollak 1994, 1996, Gustafsson 1997, Joshi et al. 1999). Theoretical developments in the period 1980-1990 - when Becker was putting together his enlarged edition of ToF (1991) - show a rise in game-theoretical, path-dependency, and neo-institutional economic approaches. Issues concerning international differences and policies were addressed by institutionalist approaches that were linked to neoclassical notions of optimizing behavior, explicit and implicit markets and the search for stable equilibria (on this, see e.g. Hodgson 1988). In the early 1990s more fundamental theoretical and conceptual critiques appeared in the field of 'women's issues' applying a feminist perspective (see e.g. Nelson 1989, Strassmann 1989) and alternative concepts and theories were developed (see e.g. Sen & Crown 1985, Elson (ed.) 1991).

In these years critiques and discussions were published on Gary Becker's conceptualization of the family. He was criticized for his simplification of family relations, his vagueness and excessive flexibility, which together make the theory hard to test and all too easy to find confirmation for it. He was also criticized for his neglect of power differences between husband and wife and for his perception of biological differences between the sexes. Feminist economists such as Grossbard-Shechtman (1984, 1993) and Gustafsson (1990, 1997) regard the Treatise on the Family as an important step forward because it enables economists to analyze and theorize behavior within the family and around marriage, while others such as Bergmann (1986) questioned the explanatory power of this theory. Notwithstanding these critiques, perhaps even inspired by them, Becker continued working in this field and came with an updated, enlarged edition of his Treatise on the Family in 1991.

As an epilogue, I hereby address the enlarged edition of the Treatise of the Family by Becker and the latest volume of the Handbook of Labor Economics (1999) to see what use has been made of recent development inside and outside the discipline.

Despite the developments and discussions mentioned, Becker's 1991 edition remained essentially the same as the 1981 edition. One of the few changes Becker makes is to restate 'the economic approach' in his preface as 'the rational choice approach' increasingly used in sociology and political science. The passage on the applicability of his economic approach to the 'non-human world' is skipped. The rest of the text of the 1981 edition is kept intact. Becker extends the introduction with a reply to his critics and adds supplements to four chapters.

241 See Folbre 1986.
242 See also Blaug 1980.
244 A supplement on 'Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor' is added to Chapter 2: 'Division of Labor in Households and Families'; a supplement on 'A Reformulation of the Economic Theory of Fertility' is added to Chapter 5: 'The Demand for Children'; a supplement on 'Human Capital and the Rise and Fall of Families' is added to Chapter 7: 'Inequality and Intergenerational Mobility' and a supplement on 'The Family and the State' is added to Chapter 11: 'The Evolution of the Family'.

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In response to part of the critiques Becker denies that he relies on biological explanations of the division of labor in the household. '[T]he message is that even small amounts of market discrimination against women or small biological differences between men and women can cause huge differences in the activities of husbands and wives' (Becker 1991, 4) His denial that he applied a biological concept of gender differences and his discussion on the biological underpinnings of behavior gives the impression that he wants to get out of this straightjacket and at the same time keep him from really achieving this. Therefore, no substantial changes are made in this respect.

The supplements add material to the book from articles mostly published after 1981. In his supplement to the Chapter 2 on the division of labor in households and families, entitled 'Human Capital, Effort, and the Sexual Division of Labor', Becker introduces the concept of 'energy'. The gender distinction between men specializing in human capital for market work and women in household work becomes replaced by the distinction between those who have a lot of energy to invest in market work and those who have little energy left to invest in market work because they do the housework. Becker mentions the possibility that the biological distinction between women and men might not much longer coincide with the energy distinction he makes. This is something however, he places in a far future and outside his analysis.

The supplements added to Chapter 5 (on The Demand for Children) and Chapter 7 (on Inequality and Intergenerational Mobility) addresses the relationship between fertility, wealth and consumption over various generations. In 'A Reformulation of the Economic Theory of Fertility' (supplement to Chapter 5) Becker models altruism in the family, includes it in the utility function of children and derives a utility function of a dynastic family. In 'Human Capital and the Rise and Fall of Families' (supplement to Chapter 7) he distinguishes human capital from wealth and incorporates restrictions on the intergenerational transference of debt. The utility of parents comes thus to depend here on the utility of children instead of on the permanent income of children and endogenous fertility comes to depend on the relation between the wealth and the consumption of parents and children. Becker assumes here two identical parents and links his theoretical model to data on the earnings and wealth of different generations of men (grandfathers, fathers and sons). What is remarkable here is that he does so without addressing the differences between boys and girls in these cases and without paying any attention to the relation between the earnings and wealth of mothers and those of daughters. Becker echoes here the conceptualisation of families as three generations of men as formulated by William Petty, and Alfred Marshall, who accounted for the human capital invested in boys only. Where in Petty's days however, inheritance was indeed a matter of fathers and sons, the use of gender structure in Becker (1991) no longer coincides with the daily practice of inheritance.

In the supplement on 'The Family and the State', added to the last chapter on 'The Evolution of the Family', Becker states that 'we believe that a surprising number of state interventions mimic the agreements that would occur if children were capable of arranging for

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245 Ben-Porath states that 'the biological differences are an essential element in the explanation. In Becker's analysis they are the source of systematic intersex differences in comparative advantages and they are the reason why people are not identical.' (Ben-Porath 1982, 53)

246 'A person's sex would then no longer be a valid predictor of earnings and household activities. It is still too early to tell how far Western societies will move in this direction.' (Becker 1991, 79)
CHAPTER 7: REVISITING THE TEXTS OF BECKER AND PENCAVEL

their own care' (Becker 1991, 363) and that the state in this way is concerned about justice for children. Becker not only claims empirical applicability, but also suggests political arrangements to support his perception of efficient families:

'in this supplement we sketch an analysis to interest-group behavior that can lead to government intervention to promote efficient family arrangements.' (Becker 1991, 363)

From this it must be concluded that the critiques, debate and change in the academic and social context did not induce fundamental changes in Becker's theoretization of the family nor his use of the biological concept of gender. Instead the additions he makes contain further elaboration of the biological conceptualization of gender relations. Becker has not been able to escape his straitjacket in which he reproduces hierarchical and asymmetrical perceptions of gender. Considering the amount of freedom he had to change the old way of using a biological concept of gender differences and to redefine the current perception of gender, we have to conclude that Becker missed an important opportunity here. Others will have to do that work.

What about the new volume of the _Handbook of Labor Economics_? The recently published Volume IIIc does contain more contributions from women (5 out of total of 17; of the 50 authors of the three volumes of the Handbook, 8 are women). But as the preface by Ashenfelter & Card, the editors of this volume IIIc, indicates 'the earlier volumes contained careful descriptions of the conceptual apparatus for analysis of a topic, these new volumes contain a wealth of detailed empirical analyses.' (1999, xiii) Thus a reconceptualization or reorganization of Volume I is not at issue here: this part of Volume III adds new work on race and gender, leaving the base model of Labor Economics as linked to men's behavior intact.

Chapter 48 on 'Race and Gender in the Labor Market', by Joseph G. Altonji and Rebecca M Blank is the first chapter of the second part (part 13) on 'Policy Issues in the Labor Market'. This chapter assumes and concentrates on a US context and starts from the neoclassical apparatus, which strongly directs the questions asked and the issues addressed. The biological concept of gender differences is applied and the statistical differences between white males and black males, white males and white females, etc. is discussed. Aspects of gender and race differences are divided into characteristics either of the market or of individuals. There is no substantial overview of analyses of institutional structures provided nor is the interrelation between the organization of gender relations and labor market outcomes addressed. In their overview of current theoretical research Altonji & Blank mention theories that address 'occupational exclusion and crowding based on employer discrimination, social norms or institutional constraints' (Altonji & Blank 1999, 3165). They limit their discussion however, to one model and state that 'a major weakness of the theoretical literature continues to be the lack of formal models that analyze the mechanisms through which social norms or institutional constraints arise and are sustained [...] With the rapid development of game theory over the past 15 years, such models might now be feasible to develop.' (Altonji & Blank 1999, 3180)247

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247 Jolande Sap concludes her article on 'Bargaining power and wages. A game-theoretic model of
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7.6 Conclusions

This Chapter returned to the analysis of Becker (1981) and Pencavel (1986), this time applying the analytical framework of Ch. 4, and using the results from Ch. 5 and 6. Does this additional analysis indeed help us to answer the questions elaborated in Ch. 2 and 3?

The first set of questions addressed the role of gendered economic concepts in the construction of gender. This Chapter indicated various ways in which Pencavel's and Becker's texts build on established economic texts and on their gendered meanings by (mostly implicitly) taking these over as established concepts (see also Chapter 8).

The last set of questions articulated in Chapters 2 and 3 address the impact of the current state of the debate in economics and of the social and economic context. As we saw in this chapter, both Becker's and Pencavel's texts lag behind current changes in gender relations. Particularly where the conceptualization of the human agent and more general images such as the Family are concerned, Becker and Pencavel seem to fall back on much earlier experiences and to apply default assumptions and images, rather than to make assessments of the present state of affairs. The construct of a white, American prime-age male, who works for pay and has a wife at home who takes care of the kids, appeared to echo the self-image of mid-eighties American economists. The group of male economists, of whom a selection contributed to the Handbook of Labor Economics, were educated and did most of their empirical and theoretical work in an era in which it was common for wives to stay home to take care of their children and husband.

Both Pencavel and Becker seem unable to free themselves from the biological concept of gender and to introduce and elaborate other, possibly less hierarchical and asymmetrical perceptions of gender. Moreover they use the freedom they have in their work to reproduce and construct hierarchical and asymmetrical perceptions of gender and apply a masculine perspective in the elaboration of their arguments. Both fall back on the traditional concept of the family, in which husband and wife are one, 'and that one is the husband'.

There is finally the question: Is there a conceptualization of gender available that would enable someone like Pencavel or Becker to deal more adequately with gender questions? How can gender be conceptualized so as to escape from Becker's straitjacket in which perceived differences between women and men are again and again reduced to their biological difference? This topic will be dealt with in the next Chapter.

gender differences in union wage bargaining' (1993) by addressing the question '[w]hat additional insights could they [attempts to extent game-theoretical models on the issue of wage bargaining, EK] in the relationship between gender, power and wages?' Sap concludes that '[W]ithin a bargaining framework, power ultimately reduces to an attribute or possession of an individual. Although this type of power certainly is important, there are other types of power that can hardly be reduced to individual beings, such as the power inherent in values, norms, habits, and institutionalized rules and practices'.
(Sap 1993, 43)