

**Positioning the
Profession
Beyond
Patriarchy**

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Introduction

This paper sets out to challenge home economists¹ to consider their profession from the covert perspective of patriarchy. This perspective involves developing an understanding of patriarchal society, the concept of *patriarchy*, and the way in which home economics as a professional field has developed within this ideology. The position held in the paper is that home economics has operated within patriarchy, leading to predictable outcomes. As a fundamental principle, the patriarchal ideology guarantees that certain groups are privileged while others are marginalized. In the case of home economics, working within patriarchal ideology generally has resulted in the profession being located on the less desirable side of the binary. This paper explores some of the problems that come with being marginalized and of being compliant to patriarchy as the governing ideology. The case is made that, as a profession, we need to develop awareness of patriarchy as a constraining ideology. Finally, some specific strategies are posed for moving beyond the confining enclosures of the patriarchy trap.

What is Patriarchy?

Patriarchy literally means rule by the father. However, the word patriarchy is often used loosely in place of the more accurate term

¹ In this paper, the authors use the term *home economics* as a title of convenience to encompass the broad field of study that has come to be known under a variety of titles in various parts of the world. By utilizing this terminology, we do not intend to privilege or exclude practitioners or professional bodies who prefer alternative titles. On the contrary, we hope to engage with all members of the profession.

andrarchy, i.e., the rule or dominance of males, regardless of whether they are fathers (Schussler-Fiorenza, 2003). Any social, political, economic, or educational system that grants privileged status to males, and permits or encourages their domination of women, is a patriarchal system (Kemerling, 2001).

The concept of patriarchy is not new, nor is it new to recognize women's marginalized positioning as explained by patriarchy. In developing an understanding of patriarchy, Kelly explained patriarchy as an ideology that

... orders relations between the sexes and between generations on specific lines—it divides home and work into masculine and feminine spheres, and into a hierarchy, with men in the more powerful and prestigious positions where they exercise power and authority over women and children. The male dominated family in fact lies at the root of the patriarchy, because no matter how rich or poor they may be, men can rely on being the heads of their households, in which women submit to their authority. In all societies women's work is anchored in domestic labour, focused on the household and children, and in all societies the early socialization of children is part of women's domestic labour (1981, p. 59).

Patriarchy is an ideology—an unquestioned set of values and beliefs held by a social group. Patriarchy favors men over women and confers power to men and dependency to women (Ady, 2000). Like all successful ideologies, patriarchy has become so ordinary that it is largely invisible or assumed. It is successful because it (a) explains people's place in nature, society,

and history; (b) contains beliefs and values that people see to be true and worthy; (c) is plausible enough to mesh with common-sense understandings of facts about social reality; and (d) is useful in serving the needs and interests of those in power and in justifying that they remain in power (Duerst-Lahti, 1998)—hence, the strong hold patriarchy has over society. Patriarchy is generally accepted as the basis upon which most modern societies have been formed.

A distinguishing feature of patriarchy is that it creates dualisms about every aspect of the world. One side of the binary pair is desirable because it is powerful; the other is undesirable—a disempowered, powerless, or marginalized position. Hierarchies divide and separate human beings into categories such as gender, class, economic status, and political power. Importantly for home economics, it also divides according to work (paid/unpaid) and to space (public/private). These hierarchies are based upon the assertion that it is better for society if men have power over some men and always over women. The empowered or the elite (sometimes women) gain control and advantages, which the elite, in turn, withhold from women, some men, and vulnerable groups. Any hierarchy imposes restraints on those on the lower rungs of the ladder who end up sharing most of the burden of shoring up the power of the elite. Those on the lower rungs are the power behind the upper elite but are so oppressed that they do not see themselves in this light. Hence, patriarchy is considered to be normal, logical, full of common sense, and effective in maintaining the status quo of societal functioning.

Patriarchy is a powerful ideology. It holds that nature is there for humans to conquer and manage, that people should be ranked using class-based and gender-based

structures. Patriarchy holds that there is no place for women in history, in the story of the evolution of humans (history/herstory). It holds that property ownership, dominance, profit, and competition are worthy values; hence, women are seen as chattel and are supposed to be dominated, profit comes before compassion, and competition trumps cooperation. These ideas fit with a common-sense understanding of power relations in society. Those in power justify their actions in the policy arena, labour market, economy, community, churches, and the home. All is done in the name of national security, global competition, and technological progress (Lerner, 1986).

Those who do not embrace the ideology of patriarchy may say things like, “How can they *do* that? How can they live with themselves doing what they do to people and the earth?” Those who have been truly indoctrinated into the ideology hardly ever see anything wrong with most actions stemming from the powered elite. Even when their own freedom, independence, and well-being are threatened, they say, “I deserved it. Someone else knows what is best for me. What else can I do? It has always been done this way. It would be wrong to resist.” When these sentiments prevail, the patriarchal ideology is especially successful.

To ensure its continual success, patriarchy builds a support system around itself by establishing control over both resources and social/cultural values. It also directs the production and application of knowledge, the creation of myths and meaning and metaphors, and the historic narratives and stories by which people, nations, and ethnic and religious groups identify themselves and assume their places in the world (Koenig, 2004; Lerner, 1986). This insidious platform of power is hard to challenge and dismantle

because it becomes invisible. People acquiesce to this power base and accept its definitions of reality, expected social roles, and power relationships—and they do so easily because they do not see the scaffolding.

A key element in this support system is the notion that there is an essential difference between males and females. Females perpetuate this system by filling the subservient role and by instilling similar values in future generations. Even today with many women performing paid work outside the home, most reinforce patriarchal values by maintaining both paid work and unpaid work in the home, popularly called the double-shift.

The effect of patriarchy with its ideological practices is that it is blindly accepted as the norm. Those living within its parameters and defining characteristics, despite the implications, do not speak out for viable alternatives. The status quo is maintained, and there is an acceptance that this is the way society can best, and hence ought to, function. These practices reinforce the structures that perpetuate what seems to be a common sense way to operate society.

Home Economics and Patriarchy: Maintaining the Status Quo

Accepting patriarchal ideology as the dominant philosophy underpinning society has had, and will continue to have, profound effects. This is particularly true within the home economics profession because it is a field of study that brings together, in almost every sense, the least powerful of the binary pair. It is dominated by females, has a focus on the home, involves the private sphere, and is often not paid work (Pendergast, 2001b).

Although there is not an abundance of insightful work in the area, attempts to theorize patriarchy and its interplay with the profession of home economics do exist in the literature. Perhaps the most significant is that of Thompson (1988, 1992) who developed the concept of herman/hestian spheres as a way to understand the effects of patriarchal ideology, in this case focusing on the binary of the public/private sphere and the subsequent effects on power. The public (herman) sphere is valued in patriarchy because it has an economic value. People are paid to do work. The hestian mode represents the private sphere. It lacks value in an economic model because the work of the home has no monetary value assigned to it. For this reason, it moves automatically to the devalued side of the dualism. The less desirable of the work/home, paid/unpaid binaries are assigned to the home and family spheres within a patriarchal society. In capitalist societies in particular, this relegates home economics to the margins because of its concern with the realities of everyday life, particularly (but not exclusively) the home and the unpaid context.

Others have called into question the hegemonic values contained in curricula that reinforce societal status quo. For example, in 1991 Eyre described the home economics curriculum in Canada as “sexist, classist, racist, and heterosexist” (p. 103), arguing that home economics reinforced inequities in society. Perhaps the best known international critic of home economics is Attar (1990), who published the book with the telling title “*Wasting girls [sic] time: The history and politics of home economics.*” This author condemned home economics for creating stereotypes and reinforcing patriarchal ideology. More recently, Pendergast (2001b) confirmed that very little has changed in the 15 years since

Eyre and Attar launched attacks on the profession. She argued that the home economics professional culture continued to be dominated by patriarchal ideology, rather than shifting to the more desirable position where competing ideologies and subcultures are encouraged to flourish. It is this reality that is the basis of this paper.

Re-membering the Story of Home Economics

Interestingly, it can be demonstrated that home economics has a history of compliance with patriarchal demands that extends back to its very origins. Revisiting these origins sets the scene for understanding the extent to which home economics as a profession has unquestionably accepted its marginalized positioning in society. For some, this may be a very uncomfortable journey.

Ellen Swallow Richards is generally agreed to be the leading founder of the field of home economics.² As a scholar, she is regarded as “the most prominent female American chemist of the 19th century” and is characterized as having “campaign[ed] tirelessly for the new discipline of home economics” (Chemical Heritage Foundation, 2006, p. 2). Richards was the first president of the American Home Economics Association (AHEA), formed in 1909 after a decade of summer conferences held at Lake

Placid, New York. Although some are familiar with the inception of AHEA, it is not widely known that Richards and her colleagues had many struggles before their ideas and the establishment of the field were accepted in the academy.

Indeed, Richards’ initial proposals for a new field of study were rejected by the academic world in the late 1800s. That is, they were rejected until she and her team of advocates found a way to define the emerging field within the privileged male-dominated scientific paradigm, using this framework as a way of conceptualizing and measuring the value of the work. For example, Richards initially chose the name “human ecology” as the preferred name for the new profession (Vincenti, 1997, p. 307). But the men in the biology discipline took issue with this idea. She and the co-founders proposed home economics as an alternative and regarded this as an appropriate title for women’s work focusing on the domestic sphere. Brown (1985) cited Richards’ justification of the name in 1909: “home means the place of shelter and nurture for the children and for those personal qualities of self-sacrifice for others for the gaining of strength to meet the world; economics means the management of this home on economic lines as to time and energy as well as to mere money. Lake Placid stood from the first for a study of these economic and ethical lines, *let them lead where they would* [emphasis added]” (pp. 246-247).

With this caveat in hand, the academic men then *let her in* to the academy. In so doing, the men of the academy, in effect, regulated the new field and placed it on the less favored side of the binary dualism. This was comfortable for men because, at the time, women were not considered to have any power or status. Nor were women seen as making a challenge to the fields that were

²Margaret Arcus is writing a history of IFHE for the 2008 100-year celebration. The IFHE story will provide a balanced version of the evolution of home economics at the global level. For this paper, we are drawing on the U.S. history that involved Canadians and was influential in shaping home economics in many countries. As well, the British model for home economics had a great influence in Africa, and their story is likely different. We respect and deeply value these differences, and invite you to read on with an open mind.

considered powerful and important, such as science (Attar, 1990). Ironically, Richards and her colleagues were advocating for scientific management of the work of the home for efficiency and economy (Brown, 1985, p. 249). This history confirms that (a) home economics was established within a society that was dominated by a patriarchal ideology and (b) the founders, predominantly women, were required to conform to its power distribution before they could establish a profession. This interpretation is supported by Rossiter (1995, 1997) who investigated women scientists and the challenges they overcame to be recognized within their fields. *Home* clearly did not threaten the highly valued public domain. *Economics*, within this context, was accepted as a virtuous initiative, with *virtuous* meaning right or proper conduct.

At that time, Richards and the new field of study were not a threat to what was considered valued and valuable knowledge. Home economics involved women's knowledge of the domestic sphere and was considered second-class or marginal when compared to the valued public scientific paradigm. Thus, home economics was conceived within a patriarchal paradigm and positioned accordingly (Pendergast, 2001 a, b). This interpretation of the events is not to suggest that Richards and her colleagues were in any way remiss or inappropriate in their actions. It does, however, confirm that patriarchal ideology ruled the day, a claim borne out by the events as they occurred.

The act of naming, defining, and formally recognizing domestic knowledge as a field of study was regarded by first-wave feminists to be an acknowledgement of the value of women's work and knowledge and a step towards equality of the sexes. At the time that home economics was established

as a field of study, *radical* feminists were concerned with the low pay and poor work conditions of factory workers, many of whom were women. Meanwhile, *liberal* feminists wanted to improve the status of women as it related to domestic responsibilities, without regard for the fact that it was unpaid labour (Reiger, 1990). The formation of home economics as a field of study coincided with these desires (Rossiter, 1997), and the timing of these events created a permanent problem for the field, one that ensured that the status quo of patriarchy was easily maintained. Neither liberal nor radical feminism offered an escape from patriarchy—both worked within the paradigm, reinforcing its values as the norm and strengthening the dominance of its ideology over society.

A further dilemma for home economics, from a historical perspective, resulted from its position as a subject for students of lower ability—at least in some instances (e.g., Australia). As the subject established itself in some schools, students were assigned to the subject to compensate for disadvantaged backgrounds and to prepare the underprivileged for their likely place in society. It was assumed that domestic workers were unlikely to gain an education that might offer an escape from this positioning. Practical or applied subjects, such as home economics, were regarded as a way to prepare women for their future roles as domestic workers, future mothers, or wives who were competent to manage the domestic sphere (Brown, 1985; Petrina, 1998); hence, home economics was associated with lower-achieving students. As Thorne (1980, p. 16) noted, “. . . rooted in poverty and low status, the domestic subjects also became associated with low ability levels.” The effects of this positioning have been profound, as highlighted in the following excerpt:

Home economics is a classic example of a subject that has been bedeviled by perception of its relatively low status . . . it was a subject designed explicitly for girls, and taught almost exclusively by women. Its focus was the private rather than the public sphere of activity, and unpaid rather than paid work. Its orientation was more towards the practical than the academic (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990, p. 1).

Half way around the world, on another continent, home economics developed from a different position. American home economists were faulted for imposing middle class values and lifestyles on the lower class and immigrant poor and for losing their original focus on social concerns (Apple, 1997). Also, Brumberg (1997) discussed the negative and racial stereotyping perpetuated by early home economists in the United States. She described this as a “painful stage of the profession’s history” (p. 196).

Despite these issues, formal recognition through the formation of an entire new academic subject (even though it tied women to narrow social roles) was seen as a profoundly positive step toward valuing females in society. It was considered an important contribution that would help women to achieve their natural destiny in life. Unfortunately, it sat comfortably within the status quo of patriarchy. Topics were chiefly of a practical nature and were applicable to women’s functioning within the household. Home economics drew its initiative from the growing prestige of science, which “counted” as knowledge, and applied this scientific approach to the running of the home. This science

component gave home economics a type of respectability (legitimization) among academic subjects (Apple, 1997). Because women were only borrowing science from men to apply it to the home, it was no threat to men’s powerful knowledge base. The applied knowledge that females were encouraged to pursue was considered an inappropriate time-waster for boys, whose primary objective was to receive an education that would lead to paid work (Attar, 1990). Because of these origins, home economics often remains linked to poverty, low social status, domesticity, and women. Arguably, even though contemporary home economics bears little resemblance to its predecessors, these perceptions remain as prominent reminders of the field’s history (Department of Employment, Education and Training, 1990; Stage & Vincenti, 1997; von Schweitzer, 2006). To counter these perceptions, the profession in United States is taking steps to deal with diversity issues within and outside the profession (Vincenti, 1997).

With the benefit of reflective hindsight, it is evident that from the very birth of the profession, metaphorically speaking, home economists were allowed into the boys’ club of the academic world—the first step up the ladder of legitimization as a recognized field of study. However, they were not allowed to have the benefits, collegiality, and acceptance afforded to other valued fields. It is the contention of this paper that the profession continues this tradition of being compliant in its marginalized position even today. Many of the strategies, decisions, and chaotic behaviors evidenced in, for example, the name changes to the profession, are manifestations of a profession striving to be accepted by those in power, on their terms—an unachievable vision given patriarchal ideology. This was a proposition von Schweitzer (2006) agreed with, particularly

with respect to the pattern of name changes. She suggested that the change to ‘family and consumer sciences’ in the United States, for example, will in all likelihood prove to be of temporal value and “just a concession to the spirit of the times” (p. 85). She urged the profession to constructively deal with the name change issue, which in her view “must be resolved on a global scale” (p. 86). Vincenti (1997) explained that some of those attending the Scottsdale Conference in United States, where the decision was made to change the name, “felt [the Conference] had created a new profession that not only built upon but transcended home economics” (p. 306). It appears that this has not been borne out over time; a serious decline in membership of professional bodies indicates that the change of name has served to alienate, disenfranchise, and dilute the identity of the profession. The name of the profession remains a contentious issue worldwide, inside and outside the profession. The authors feel that this preoccupation with the label contributes to our oppression. Fortunately, moves to take leadership in this global dilemma are currently afoot. The International Federation of Home Economics³ (IFHE) Think Tank committee is currently developing a Position Paper on Home Economics where the name issue is directly addressed (IFHE, 2006b).

There can be no doubt that an understanding of the profession’s origins as bound by patriarchal concerns explains how the precedent was set for the profession’s constant search for legitimization, a search that continues to this day. To bring the argument full circle, the authors propose that

³ The International Federation of Home Economics is “the only worldwide organisation concerned with Home Economics and Consumer Studies. It was founded in 1908 to serve as a platform for international exchange within the field of Home Economics” (IFHE, 2006a).

being barred from the networking, from the positions of status at the bar, and from the power brokering that takes place at such venues in the academy, in schools, in governments, and in businesses, has entrenched the profession in the margins. And here home economics sits today, 100 years later, thirsty and desperate for attention (Pendergast, 2002).

The Legitimization Trap

From the very inception of the field, home economists have bowed to the dominant discourse of patriarchy. This pattern has continued as the dominant practice. The profession has sought legitimacy within this framework by adopting what were arguably well intentioned but inappropriate practices (Pendergast, 2003, 2004a, b; Stage & Vincenti, 1997). For example, there has been a shift away from the references to home and family that are not valued in patriarchal society, to those that are valued as legitimate patriarchal practices. This shift is reflected in the renaming and refocusing the profession on science, ecology, consumption, clients, and the like. It is typified by a long list of new names that were genuinely expected to reposition the field—names such as domestic science, home science, family and consumer sciences, human sciences, human ecology, human development, nutritional sciences—all to no avail. Rossiter (1997) insightfully referred to these labels as “somewhat more gender-neutral” and explained that 50 years ago male administrators used them to “reshape the formerly female bastion of home economics” (p. 116). Indeed, she offered the compelling insight that men interpreted home economists’ success in obtaining grants and funding in the sixties as a powerful signal that home economics was a lucrative field worth taking over (p. 106). Rossiter also shared a persuasive recount of

the deliberate masculinization of the faculty and to a lesser extent the student body of home economics, a strategy led by male deans replacing retiring female deans.

The profession has continued to build the trap by agreeing to or being forced into mergers with allied departments that *are* legitimate within patriarchy. Through these alliances with fields like medicine, science, agriculture, architecture, and business, the profession has gained a sort of pseudo-legitimization. On a related front, the profession has succumbed to funding cuts by hiring non-home economists so that faculty positions are not lost. Although they may have made the case that attracting people from other disciplines was necessary due to increasing specialization within the field, it can be argued that this justification plays into the hands of patriarchy to divide and conquer. Specializations signal fragmentation and lack of interdisciplinarity, the original hallmark of the profession (Brown, 1993). The profession has changed the focus (from families to consumers), the mission (from social transformation to a narrower concept of well-being), the terminology (from empowerment to management and environmental language), and the purpose (from integrative approach to specialized focus) with the expectation of gaining legitimacy in the patriarchal system. Yet as Pendergast (2001b, 2003) pointed out, using “the masculine master’s tools” only reinforces *their* legitimacy and *their* value, making them increasingly more powerful while those who comply become less valued and further pushed into the margins.

Despite the profession’s best intentions, the dominant ideological paradigm of influence—patriarchy—still prevails as the guiding doctrine over the modus operandi of the profession. This ideological presence

reconfirms that home economics remains on the periphery of the system, literally on the outside looking in. In 1997, Vincenti claimed that it might be possible for “family and consumer sciences [to] move in from the margin toward the center of the academy and society” (p. 319). She continued with the following caveat: “However, until our [patriarchal] culture becomes less gender-biased, we will continue to have many societal problems that result from the marginalization of women, their ideas and values” (p. 319). This legitimization trap, resulting in entrenched marginalization, has been costly to the profession (an idea also supported by Stage and Vincenti, 1997). In making these changes, the profession reinforced the very politics that served to disempower it. The profession is constantly seeking legitimization and acceptance by others considered powerful and valued at the time (von Schweitzer, 2006). Many regard the profession as a very powerless and disempowering place to be. The re-making of the theory and practices of home economics throughout the twentieth century served to destabilize the profession and suggested to those beyond the profession that home economics does not have a clear purpose, direction, or value (Pendergast, 2006a, b).

This legitimization imperative remains at the forefront of the home economics profession today. As a powerful example, the mission of the national body for home economics in Australia, with over fourteen hundred members, is to “enhance the professionalism and political *legitimation* of Australian Home Economists” (HEIA, 2006). This well-intentioned mission reinforces the existing power structure and maintains the marginal position of home economics as a field seeking to be valued, approved, and legitimized by the power brokers. The profession actually positions itself as a field

that needs to catch up with the mainstream. Firebaugh and Brumberg (1997) confirmed that “the home economics profession was ignored, misunderstood, and even maligned. . . . within the larger context of the history of female professionalization in the United States” (p. ix). The authors hold that this situation continues today at our own hands, and it can be reversed by our own hands.

Re-visioning Home Economics Beyond Patriarchy

Making the shift from a marginal place is what the profession now needs to consider—making the seemingly impossible possible. von Schweitzer (2006, pp. 30-31) confirmed the enormity of this task in her comment, “. . . patriarchy can only be destabilized by a generation of women who are committed to this area of life, but at the same time acquire all the competencies to carry the responsibility for it and gain social recognition and political equality.” Admittedly, like swimming upstream, the task of re-thinking a profession that is immersed in the marginalizing doctrine of patriarchy is a huge challenge. There is an inherent risk of drowning during the rescue. But the reality is that if there is no attempt to throw a life vest to the profession, it will inevitably continue to drown. This particular life vest comprises (a) an overview of four challenges that home economists have to face as they re-vision the profession, (b) some stories of home economists who are pushing back against patriarchal boundaries, and (c) six strategies which open possibilities for home economists to transform the profession.

Accepting the Challenges

As argued thus far, home economics is disempowered within the ideological parameters of patriarchal society. Because

the profession comprises mainly women with a focus on the home and family, the profession is subordinated within this system. Home economics is located in a gendered regime of power and knowledge that can and does have repressive effects. It is what the profession *does* with and about this, from an informed perspective, that can make a significant impact. Following are four challenges to freeing home economics from the patriarchy trap.

The *first challenge* involves the meaning of practice in a profession that focuses on home and families within patriarchal society. With such an understanding it will be possible to contest boundaries. When breaking from the hold of gender conditioning and engaging in conscious reinforcement of ourselves, home economists will have to deal with (a) the external, systemic restraints imposed on the profession by the patriarchal system and (b) the internal, unacknowledged restraints embedded deeply within each person’s psyche. These restraints are so deep, so much a part of the subconscious, that we understandably balk at being asked to examine our own roles. We assume a defensive stance instead of examining how our current circumstances arose. This posture prevents us from determining whether the home economics profession is positioned correctly for contemporary times, for a sustainable future, or for the membership.

The silencing and objectification of women (and anything associated with women’s knowledge) continues to form the dominant master narrative that shapes thinking in our society. This forms the basis for male subjectivity (Lerner, 1986). Silencing occurs despite a greater understanding and appreciation for the underpinnings and effects of such ideological parameters. New

ways of thinking and doing, such as those offered by postmodernism and new feminism, remain peripheral to the dominant discourse of patriarchy. Such was the case when home economics was founded, and such is the case today. This ideology prefers the masculine, and it structures institutions and practices to reinforce and perpetuate this preference (Duerst-Lahti, 1998). Again, home economists have (understandably) struggled to legitimize the profession within this ideology (see Stage and Vincenti, 1997; especially Apple, 1997). As has been argued, remaking, renaming, and reconceptualising the field to remain current with contemporary valued knowledge as legitimized by the hierarchy has been a losing position. We have spent our time swimming up-stream, against a strong and invisible current.

The *second challenge* facing the profession is our focus on the family as a social institution, at a time when the family is not as valued as other institutions. The free market, the capitalist economy, conservative governments, and the like are respected far more highly. An institution is a custom, practice, relationship, or behavioral pattern of importance in the life of a community or society. Society needs the institution of the family because it fulfills basic functions: (a) love, nurturance, and morale; (b) physical maintenance and care of family members; (c) household maintenance and support; (d) social control and teaching of positive values; (e) addition of new family members and their relinquishment when mature; (f) socialization of children for their adult roles; and (g) production and consumption. Addressing the challenge of valuing the family as a social institution requires an understanding of the power relationships that create dualities of private and public spheres, and valuation of money and wealth

over people and life. Only then can more synergistic, holistic views emerge.

The profession's *third challenge* stems from its marginalized status and the legitimization efforts it has conducted over time. This can no longer be our strategy if the field is to be sustained as a profession. Utilizing a patriarchal framework to legitimize women's knowledge might have been revolutionary when Ellen Swallow Richards started the profession 100 years ago, but it is not revolutionary anymore (Pendergast, 2001a). Ironically, the patriarchal system counted on home economists doing exactly what they did so the imbalanced power relationships could be maintained. Past actions, despite best intentions, have had a negative effect on the profession. Although compliance was *not* the intention, the result was the same. Lack of knowledge facilitated this approach and led to unwitting complicity in keeping the profession marginalized. Certain actions taken over the last 100 years were designed to reconfigure home economics to gain legitimacy, authenticity, and validity. Instead, the profession has involuntarily, even unwittingly, perpetuated a culture of powerlessness, frustration, inadequacy, and worthlessness (McGregor et al., 2004). The situation is compounded by a profound belief that we have the potential and wherewithal to change the world (Dr. Kaija Turkki, personal communication, June 27, 2007).⁴ A new strategy is required for the future.

⁴ Rossiter (1997) shared a compelling story of how some American home economists in the 1960s acquiesced to the deliberate masculinization of the home economics faculty (p. 109), while others tried to thwart the male titans' attempt to install male Deans and faculty. She wrote, "The ousted women rarely protested publicly. Some took to preparing scrapbooks or writing the history of the program as they had known it, often ending with an ambivalent chapter called 'winds of change'" (p. 116). Vincenti

The *fourth challenge* for the profession is to acknowledge that, while the profession was trying to gain legitimacy (via changes to name, focus, terminology, and realignment with valued disciplines), the public's perceptions about the field did not change as expected and predicted. Indeed, no matter what strategy was employed, home economics remained comparatively powerless and devalued. One explanation for this is that institutions and professions in society, no matter how powerful they are, obtain their legitimacy from *the perceptions of people*. Because we all live in the same patriarchal society, we are socialized to interpret anything to do with home, women, and caring as not legitimate or valued (Lerner, 1986). Hence, even though home economics aligned itself with power within the patriarchal system, the public did not perceive the focus of our existence (home, family, and care) as valid or valued (Pendergast, 2001b). This conundrum must be considered as we reposition home economics beyond patriarchy. As long as home economics is characterized as women's knowledge used in the private sphere of the home, it will be marginalized in a patriarchal system with its focus on maintaining power and status in the domains of government and business using men's knowledge (Pendergast, 2001b; Thompson, 1988, 1992; Vincenti, 1997). That is why we have to move beyond patriarchal ideology to find new positions from which to practice.

Home Economics Beyond Patriarchy

Making new spaces for home economics—beyond patriarchy—can counter the effects of this stifling ideology. Brown (1993), an

(1997), on the other hand, noted that other women home economists found ways to fulfill their goals, not by playing the game according to the [male] rules of those in power, but by finding alternative means of achieving success (p. 318).

eminent theorist in the field, urged researchers to recognize the need to re-think home economics. There is no doubt that spaces constantly open with the rethinking of knowledge and what makes knowledge important and powerful. Still, little philosophical and theoretical work of this kind has been undertaken in the home economics field. Rejecting patriarchy as the ideology dominating the profession is a massive but necessary shift.

Pendergast (2001b, 2003, 2004a), for example, looked to the embodied practices of potentially transformative home economics teachers who refused to live by the tired clichés attached to home economics and framed by patriarchal society. She examined what they did, how they did it, how they looked, what they said, what image they presented—in other words, how they performed as home economists. Her work models a postmodern, posthumanist way to position the field. Pendergast explored the lived practices of teachers who refused to be constrained within the traditional boundaries of home economics and who refused to play the game of legitimacy that limits home economics. Pendergast's research confirmed that “no culture is condemned to marginality—the field is open to contestation and change” (2001b, p. 205). More descriptions are needed of the non-traditional professional practice of stars within the profession.

Transformational Possibilities

As argued in this paper, home economics as a lived culture has failed to recognize possibilities for reconstruction beyond the confines of patriarchy. We must now take active steps to look beyond the comfortable and known boundaries of patriarchy, and the way it governs society, to consider the plurality and the possibility of competing

subcultures and their ideologies. Following are six overall strategies aimed at both the individual and the collective interface to begin the journey of moving beyond patriarchy.

Re-conceive power. The first step is to re-conceive our understanding of power. Patriarchy encourages people to oppress others in return for the real and perceived benefit of superiority over them (dj, personal communication, August 25, 2001). We must change who holds power and the way power is conceived. Peripheralizing patriarchy is a compelling concept for changing who holds power. With patriarchy on the margins, the core opens up to be flooded with something new. Following the line of thinking tendered by Fuchs (2000), the challenge home economists face is to put patriarchy in its place without appropriating power and privilege for themselves. One way to mitigate this future is for home economists to modify the power and privilege accorded to people in ways consistent with the needs of humanity. The profession has to imagine a different paradigm and ideology than patriarchy. Power must be conceived as creative, participatory, and mutually shared. Valued ends need to include life and nature; a cyclical, contextual approach to time and issues; communal approaches; and humanitarianism. Partnerships, collaboration, and the ongoing critique of power relations should mark professional action. Tenets of this power base would include social justice, gender justice, peace and non-violence, care and giving, solidarity, transformative practice—all components of a new social contract. Professionals need to share this new power base with a focus on mutuality (Davies, 1999; J. Lemen, personal communication, September 1, 2004; McGregor, 2006; Silvermoon, 2002).

Use satire and irony. Instead of searching for an uncontaminated area unaffected by the patriarchal order, the home economics profession could attempt to expose itself for what it is from within by facing up to and challenging the dominant system. Although escaping the system is an alternative, the system itself would remain unchanged, leaving the dominant order unaffected (Davies, 1999). Satire, irony, and laughter are powerful ways for people within home economics to expose home economics for what it is. Once the profession is exposed as a victim of patriarchal power, a space is opened for putting patriarchy in its place and home economics in another space.

An international group of home economics theorists who collaborated on a philosophy of home economics (McGregor et al., 2004) did just that when they wrote an article on the confessions of recovering home economists addicted to technical practice. Pendergast (2001b) also used humor and metaphors when she referred to (a) *carnivals* to describe home economists having fun and taking pleasure in teaching and (b) *carnavalesque* to illustrate the risk of exceeding the norm when challenging the margins of the profession. She offered the idea that home economists can, and should, engage in risky activities that mock officialdom. She suggested that we should refuse order, norms, and to be kept in our place—in other words, refuse to comply with the patriarchal structures that govern society and marginalize home economics. The title she chose for her work makes everyone smile: *Virginal mothers, groovy chicks and blokey blokes*. Yet the title is not merely amusing—it represents the typical derogatory constructions of home economics teachers (virginal mothers, stitch and stir ladies, cooks and sewers, becky home ecky), along with the atypical constructions

that refuse to be normalized in this way (e.g., groovy chicks and blokey blokes).

Climb out from under baggage. Because patriarchy is so widespread, home economists have internalized the invisible power structures that restrict our reach and influence. We carry these internalized structures with us everywhere, and they become difficult baggage to lose. We need to deconstruct these power structures (inner and outer) if we are to break free. Only by letting go of the baggage can we examine experience and choose a direction, rather than being broken down by oppression and marginalization (J. Lemen, personal communication, August 31, 2004; J. Lemen, personal communication, September 1, 2004). But how can this be done on a large scale?

The objective is to come to the realization that patriarchy is not worth hanging on to, that it is not working for the profession, and that it is not comfortable anymore. Lemen (personal communication, August 31, 2004) asserted that new containers might be developed once we climb out from under the discarded ideology. These highly creative, collaborative, and spiritual containers would be rooted in love for earth and the connectedness of people. They would be rich in nurture, innovation, and wonder: full of ways to fuse the mind, body, and soul. The new approach would also include metaphors to describe the experience of being human. An example of the use of metaphors to describe the essence of home economics is provided by Canadian home economist Ellie Vaines, recently shared in a book paying tribute to her contributions (Smith, Peterat, & de Zwart, 2004, see especially the Appendices). McGregor also employed metaphors to share her thinking about home economics philosophy and leadership: lava lamps and holographs

(2006a), trees and their root systems (2006b), and ambassadors (2007).

This liberation from our own lived experience can serve as a catalyst for overcoming and freeing ourselves from the systems of the “power-over.” Liberation from a narrow consciousness, a small vision of ourselves, moves us closer to freedom in connecting with others as part of humanity. This broadening of consciousness (letting go of baggage) enables us to appreciate the nature of the patriarchy that limits our scope of vision and our potentiality (Lerner, 2004).

Become philosophically assertive and self-assured. Although assertiveness is not enough in itself, it is key to transforming the profession into non-patriarchal space. Many home economists are not assertive. Instead, they are compliant, aim to please, and try not to “rock the boat” (Pendergast, 2001a; also see Footnote 3). The assertive character trait must be nurtured, especially the ability to take a philosophical stand for the profession.

Assertiveness means standing up for oneself and for one’s profession while not stepping on the rights of others. It means having a strong belief in what one is doing, without being arrogant. Arrogance conveys a sense of superiority over others, an overbearing presence, and a deep sense of self-worth and self-importance. People who are arrogant sometimes fail to see that others even exist or that their interests merit attention.

Assertiveness, in the form of bold self-assurance, is when one states one’s position on an issue positively and with conviction. People communicating about patriarchy and home economics do so assertively by not being afraid to speak for themselves and by influencing others. But they do so in a way that respects the personal boundaries of

others. They are also willing to defend themselves when people step into their boundaries so they can mitigate undue influence that might sidetrack their position (Powers & Simon, 2003).

To be assertive and self-assured, home economists need to develop a personal philosophy that incorporates an understanding of the issues (McGregor, 2006). Prominent scholars with the capacity to lead and to facilitate such philosophical discovery must be respected by the profession, and programs of study must enable this process. Unfortunately, pruning of programs often contributes to the demise of study that might lead to a better philosophical understanding of the field.

Challenge the dominant culture of home economics. As Pendergast (2001a, b) found, there is evidence that some home economists have reformed the profession by refusing to be constrained by patriarchal parameters, thereby contesting the dominant culture of home economics. As a profession, it is paramount to target research at the innovative practices and pedagogies of individuals and small pockets of home economics practitioners who are *pushing back*. Transformational possibilities will emerge from this work.

Conclusion

Acknowledging that change is not straightforward in practice, this final segment offers practical actions to place home economics outside of patriarchy. These actions operate at the individual as well as the collective levels. Ideas were gathered from *Let patriarchy burn* (1999) and *Transformative practice: New pathways to leadership* (McGregor, 2006). Several publications are listed that explore alternatives to patriarchy.

Practical Actions

Communication

- move to a consensus approach
- hold fewer debates (where someone wins and loses) and have more conversations and dialogue (striving for shared meaning)
- establish electronic grassroots communication systems
- use language that does not create dualisms, but respects holism and interconnectedness

Focus of work

- keep family, women, and community issues on the political agenda to balance the current focus on corporations
- take charge of the situation—be assertive, not arrogant—empower self (find your inner power)
- look for fun, humor, and quirky success stories within the profession
- abandon the privilege and power you have gained through academic training and listen to others who are not as privileged—you are not the only one who is oppressed
- focus on diversity
- focus on the distribution of power, wealth, and resources at the local and global levels

Nature of meetings

- meet regularly with women in women's space (in addition to meeting with men and in mixed groups)
- organize small groups, with some central coordination, to share stories and narratives

- organize collectives instead of hierarchies
- make coffee and serve food at meetings to enhance community
- celebrate events to build a sense of community
- strive for less competition and more cooperation

Preserve heritage

- make a concerted effort to record and preserve (video, audio, writing, CD) the profession's story (referred to as knowledge management within communities of practice)
- widen your reading list to learn about the professional story

Suggested Publications from Around the World

Andrews, F., Mitstifer, D., Rehm, M., & Gary Vaughn, G. (1995). *Leadership: Reflective Human Action Module*. East Lansing, MI: KON. See also http://www.kon.org/rha_online_files/rha_online.htm

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The Challenge of Transforming the Profession

A message of unwitting complicity in reinforcing patriarchal society is challenging and disturbing to many home economists. Many professionals did not listen as Marjorie Brown articulated concerns about home economics within patriarchal

ideology. This denial of her ideas was a defensive tactic, a coping mechanism. It is time to acknowledge that the truth is self-evident. The loss of programs of study in the school curriculum and in universities, home economists' slower-than-usual climb up the academic professional ladder, the need to argue for the existence of the field in times of curriculum reform, and taking on allied fields as a way of re-making the field—all are symptomatic of a profession in need of transformation, not one that is in need of a new form of legitimization (Rossiter, 1997).

Successful ideologies become so ordinary that they become invisible and unquestioned. Conversely, a belief system that contradicts the status quo and the accepted wisdom becomes visible in ways that the dominant ideology of patriarchy does not (Duerst-Lahti, 1998). This opportunity for visibility should give us hope. What is proposed in this paper is not ordinary and does not make people feel comfortable and safe. On the other hand, changes will be visible and that gives home economists power and voice. Leaders are needed to make this happen. But there is a catch: Women are not expected to be leaders in patriarchal society, it is assumed that men will be the leaders (What is Patriarchy, 2002). Because home economics fundamentally comprises women, society does not expect the profession to lead, nor do we expect ourselves to be leaders *because we are women*. This assumption is deeply ingrained in our personal and collective psyche. Those who espouse to be leaders are said to be on the fringe of our profession. If the profession is also viewed as marginalized and on the fringe, it is no wonder members shy away from leading and focus on managing instead. Who wants to feel left out and excluded? After all, the expected role of women in a patriarchal

society is to *manage* the home, raise the children, and contribute to the community with no remuneration (Lerner, 1986). There is a saying in the home economics profession, “We are our own worst enemy.” All of this history explains why.

What is Needed?

Innovative, celebratory leadership is fundamental to freeing the profession from the patriarchy trap. Future home economics leaders will work from a grounded vision and the intellectual and philosophical capacity to move beyond the known. They will be secure in their actions to challenge the status quo, to consciously shift paradigms, and to practice from a transdisciplinary approach that fuses academia with civil society to address problems of humanity. Future leaders will value their role as transformative change agents; embrace an authentic, empowering pedagogy; and embrace intellectual skepticism and curiosity rather than complacency. They will employ the critical science perspective and discourse analysis instead of accepting the status quo in power relationships, and they will engage in reflective human action in their leadership roles (McGregor, 2006b, in press). Vincenti (1997) wrote, “A clear, positive vision for the future, based on critical self-reflection, sound reason, ethical principles, commitment, and the ability to implement the vision is extremely powerful in changing reality” (p. 318). von Schweitzer (2006) added that to effect long-lasting social change, home economists must deal with the human potential problem, the classical economic problem, the lack of humanness problem (due to technology), the complex reality problem, the value-free education problem, and the nature/human-kind problem (pp. 294-300). Leaders must probe

deeply into their identity and find out who they are and what they value (von Schweitzer, p. 294).

Peterat and Fairbanks (1993) dared to suggest that home economists do not have the emotional energy left to examine how they are living their own lives within patriarchy. For this very reason, home economists must be ready to free ourselves from *ourselves*! In order to break free from patriarchy, members of the field must learn to trust in the significance of our lived experiences as home economists (Pendergast, 2001a). The process of becoming a newly conscious person or group is liberating. People are set free from confinement, oppression, and outer control. *It is imperative that we liberate ourselves soon.* The longer the profession remains confined within the boundaries of “the great man’s system,” the longer sources of new insights are closed to us. These new insights provide the power to change individually and to move the profession to a liberated stance, free of the influence of patriarchy. The result will be home economists working toward a world free of dominance, hierarchy, racism, gender bias, inequalities, or militarism. This would be a world that is truly human (Lerner, 1986), and one where home economists are no longer relegated to the margins but are at the very core of posing and solving the world’s problems.

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