

Executive Summary: Reactors' Commissioned Thoughts About and Subsequent Uptake of Brown and Paolucci's 1979 Definition of Home Economics

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This paper contains an executive summary of McGregor's (2022) monograph that reports an inaugural analysis of reactors' ($N = 15$) commissioned thoughts about Brown and Paolucci's 1979 *Home Economics: A Definition*. To facilitate this analysis, I provided a five-page synopsis of their definitional statement wherein Brown and Paolucci ultimately tendered an inaugural mission statement that was inherently tied to a philosophy-based definition for home economics. The latter comprised

- theoretical and practical knowledge
- a metascientific perspective (i.e., analytic/empirical, interpretive, and critical), and
- three conceptual frameworks based on
 - families as transformative agents,
 - practical, perennial problems addressed using systems of action, and
 - praxis predicated on practical reasoning.

The reactors were the first home economists in the world to read and critique this new contribution to our profession.

The two-phase research design included a thematic analysis of the 100+ pages of reactors' comments as well as a secondary analysis of the thematic findings from phase one. Secondary analysis is useful when first-phase data aid researchers in answering research questions that differ from but are related to the original question. The overall research question was *What can be learned from analyzing reactors' invited thoughts about Brown and Paolucci's (1979) definition of home economics?* Phase one concerned whether the definition resonated with reactors. If so, in what ways, or why not? What, if anything, was proposed instead? Phase two queried whether any of Brown and Paolucci's or the reactors' ideas were subsequently taken up and embraced by the profession. This analysis affirmed that reactors' commentaries are just as valuable as the original definition offering historical insights with contemporary resonance.

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Overall, regarding phase one, reactors were truly appreciative of Brown and Paolucci's effort, but they did not necessarily agree with the process, end result, or how it was communicated. Seven themes (with multiple subthemes) emerged. Reactors expressed

- kudos to the definitional effort while sharing a range of adverse reactions (e.g., subthemes of struggle, resentment, rejection, alternate definitions, denial),
- their opinions about
 - the merit of the definitional exercise itself,
 - the document's accessibility and
 - the profession's readiness to embrace the ideas (six subthemes),
- agreement with
 - some elements of the proposed definition (six subthemes),
 - issues and concerns around other elements (six subthemes), and
 - suggestions for new lines of thought for future definitional initiatives (12 subthemes).

From a statistical perspective, the reactors ($n = 9$, 60%) who did comment on the merit of the exercise felt it was timely with two exceptions. Some reactors' ($n = 4$, 27%) resistance was so strong, they were moved to tender their own definition. Reported as hearsay, one reactor said some forum participants felt that no definition had been proffered at all. Nearly half (47%, $n = 7$) of the reactors agreed that the document was not accessible and needed translation, so they could internalize it let alone interpret (explain) it to others or operationalize it. Half (53%, $n = 8$) identified aspects of the definition that resonated with them. A nearly identical complement of reactors ($n = 7$, 47%) responded strongly to ideas that did not sit well with them with two people especially vociferous.

Inverting these statistics reveals that 40% of the reactors did not comment on the merit of the initiative to define home economics. Nearly three-quarters (73%) made no effort to tender their own definition. Half of the reactors did not comment on the readability of the document or the accessibility of ideas nor did they say concepts should be better defined and operationalized. That said, nearly all (80%) reactors tendered some ideas for augmentation and improvement to Brown and Paolucci's (1979) definition.

Secondary analysis of thematic findings suggested varying degrees of uptake and entrenchment of their ideas in our collective psyche: ecosystems, integration, transformation, social needs, critical science, life course (human) development, family strengths, autonomy and self-determination (capacity building), and basic human needs. Other ideas have not been widely embraced: human condition, human action, the Hegelian method, and transdisciplinarity. Subsequent definitional initiatives resulted in the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences' (see current version at AAFCS) formalized definition of the profession (2022) as well as a published body of knowledge (BOK) (Nickols et al., 2009). AAFCS' BOK progressively included ideas not contained in the reactors' thoughts: community vitality, wellness, global interdependence, and sustainability. The International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) released its definition of home economics in 2008. These efforts are profiled and critiqued in the monograph.

In short, reactors wanted an operational definition not a philosophical one. They wanted concepts defined and operationalized instead of taken for granted. They wanted assumptions acknowledged and made transparent instead of undeclared and not accessible for critique. They wanted something they could immediately use rather than having to critically reflect.

They resented being told, preferring instead to be consulted. They wanted a message they could easily internalize, so they could use it and communicate it to others. Indeed, a *major* finding was that reactors fervently believed messaging and managing expectations is everything. Definitions should be accessible, translatable to self, interpretable to others, respectfully messaged, operational, and philosophically/pragmatically balanced.

To wrap things up, I introduced *metapractice*, with *meta* meaning more comprehensive practice that transcends to a new space. To that end, home economics practitioners would create a part of their practice wherein they *think* about their practice. Part of that thought process is what defines us as a discipline and a profession—individually and collectively. This is exactly what Brown and Paolucci envisioned nearly 50 years ago when they tendered their philosophical definition of home economics.

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Biography

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Sue L. T. McGregor (PhD, IPHE, Professor Emerita MSVU) is an active independent researcher and scholar in the areas of home economics philosophy, leadership, and education; consumer studies; transdisciplinarity; and research paradigms and methodologies. She recently published Understanding and Evaluating Research with SAGE in 2018. Her scholarship is at her professional website: <http://www.consultmcgregor.com>

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