



Justifying Home Economics: Fight the right war

Sue L. T. McGregor
McGregor Consulting Group, Canada

Abstract

This position paper supports the argument that home economists have been fighting a war of attrition (i.e., a gradual wearing down through sustained attack or pressure) when they should be fighting an ideological war. Until we can see and expose the ideologies and paradigms behind people's perceptions of home economics, our litany of excuses and reasons justifying our existence goes unheard or is dismissed (unworthy of consideration), disregarded (lack of attention) or disrespected (lack of esteem and recognition). People cannot hear us anymore, if ever, because we failed to engage with ideologies and paradigms. After profiling nine dominant ideologies and seven paradigms and framing the family as a social institution (with six United Nations-sanctioned functions), a roster of 11 scenarios (battles) was presented to help home economists see the ideologies and paradigms in action in the broader public and private discourse, so they can expose them and develop different counterpoints in the war on ideology.

KEYWORDS: IDEOLOGIES; PARADIGMS; FAMILY AS A SOCIAL INSTITUTION; BRING BACK HOME ECONOMICS; WAR METAPHOR

Introduction

This position paper was prompted by a May 2022 *Times Educational Supplement* (TES) article (Hepburn, 2022), in a string of many such misguided articles, about bringing back home economics (McGregor, 2021; Pendergast, 2017; Smith 2016). The general secretary of the Scottish Secondary Teachers' Association's (SSTA) was lamenting the loss of home economics in Scottish public schools:

General secretary Seamus Searson, whose union will address the subject's troubles at its annual conference this week, said: 'Home economics as a subject is at serious risk of disappearing from secondary school timetables, as a result not only of the shortage of home economics teachers but also because of the lack of support from local authorities and headteachers.' (Hepburn, 2022, para. 4)

Upon reading his assumptions about why this was happening, I reached my limit. I wrote this article. We do *not* need saving (rescued); we need respect for what we strive to bring to the world, which is a healthy and strong family social institution. It is a sad, sad state of affairs

McGregor, S. L. T. (2022). Justifying Home Economics: Fight the right war. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 15(2), 33-45.

Email: Sue McGregor ✉ Sue.McGregor@msvu.ca

© 2022 International Federation for Home Economics

that we feel we must continually justify our existence. Home economics¹ is more than 125 years old, yet our *raison d'être* has **not** changed—the perpetual onslaught of progress on individuals, families, and homes. My burning issue is that in our efforts to stand up for and justify the profession, we fight the wrong war (i.e., a sustained conflict or contestation between groups). We may win a few battles, but we are losing the war that we subconsciously chose to fight. Instead of fighting a **war of attrition** (i.e., a gradual wearing down through sustained attack or pressure), we should be fighting an **ideological war**—a war of persistent ideas about home economics.

The Home Economics Lament

Ideologies are systems of ideas that form the basic beliefs about how the world should be and how it should be interpreted (Harper, 2023) (e.g., patriarchy, capitalism, neoliberalism, and consumerism). Ideologies are powerful cultural blueprints (dictates, assumptions) of what is (a) worthy of our *belief* and attention; (b) accepted as *true*; and (c) important, worthy, ideal, and desirable (*valued*). These blueprints (something that acts as a model or a template) are a set of rules for how society should work and how people should behave in that society and make sense of life lived by those rules. Ideologies are the ruling *ideas* of the time and a prescribed way to live our lives (Dillman, 2000; Duerst-Lahti, 1998; Johnson, 2005).

In our ignorance of the power of ideologies, when faced with the attrition of home economics, we lament instead that it is struggling because (a) public school programs are cut due to a home economics teacher shortage. (b) People in power positions (e.g., government, school administrators, governing boards) just don't appreciate who and what we are and why we're needed (i.e., we fault the people). (c) We feel maligned because people erroneously assume we are a women's profession, and somehow that is a bad thing. Most of us are women, but our focus is families where women happen to live. (d) We claim our university programs suffer because program closures and excessive specialization have led to fewer PhDs, so there is no one to hire to perpetuate the discipline (McGregor, 2015; Pendergast & McGregor, 2007). The litany goes on and on and on ad nauseam. In our ideological ignorance (i.e., lack of knowledge and awareness), **we fight the wrong war**.

My pushback to this list of excuses (explanations to justify a misfortune) and reasons (explanations of the cause of something) for our alleged demise is thus: home economics is under threat **because** of the dominance of particular ideologies (informing ideas about home economics) **and** our predisposition to not acknowledge this fact. To win the ideological war, we must expose the ideology, which is usually quite invisible (see Text Box 1, McGregor, 2015, p. 546), and argue that embracing its tenets is what threatens home economics. Everything else is just a distraction.

When calculating pension income for retired citizens, most national retirement pensions and income security policies do not *count* unpaid caregiving work done by women in the home and community. This type of work it is not captured in the national accounts (GDP) of countries because, from this observation tower (paradigm), only work that people get paid for 'counts.' The result is that women lose their income security as they age because their care giving work was not valued by policy makers who adhered to the belief systems of the market economy: competition, scarcity, profit, individualism (an ideology). Because these women contributed more to the informal economy than to the formal economy, it is assumed that they do not deserve to benefit from public monies accumulated for 'hard working retired citizens.' Because most people in society have come to accept this situation as the norm, they do not question the policy makers' decisions. Instead, they assume that the women are not worthy, that they have to go without, because they chose to engage in less valued reproductive and care giving roles rather than the more valued 'productive' role of members of society. It is assumed that a woman's place has always been in the home and should remain so. This work was never salaried because it was never considered to be a contribution to the economic wealth of a nation.

Text Box 1 Examples of Invisible Ideologies

¹ The message herein applies to home economics, family and consumer sciences (FCS), human ecology, home ecology, home sciences, human sciences, household sciences, family studies, consumer sciences, consumer and technology studies, and other names for the profession around the world—the irony of this list (*who* is fighting the war) is not lost on me.

Progress and Home Economics

Home economics came into existence in the mid-1800s to help families fight the vagaries of then unheard-of industrial progress and attendant societal transformation. In lay terms, progress usually means moving or developing toward a better, more complete, and *modern* condition. Indeed, the Modern Era, ushered in by the Second Industrial Revolution (the Age of Science and mass production, mid-1800s start date), was predicated on optimism and a belief in constant progress, especially a belief in the possibilities of technological, economic, and political progress. Unfortunately, the Modern Era took its toll on humanity via movement away from traditions (i.e., long-established customs and beliefs) toward different customs and beliefs in the name of progress (Almond et al., 1982; Trailhead, 2022)—including new or reincarnated ideologies. Families and home economists are still reeling from the industrial revolution because there was not one but four lasting nearly 300 years and still happening (David, 2016; Trailhead, 2022; Williams, 2019) (see Figure 1):

- First Industrial Revolution (1740-1850)—the age of mechanical production (steam, waterpower, and mechanization);
- Second Industrial Revolution (1850-1950)—the age of science and mass production (electricity, oil-based power, and assembly lines);
- Third Industrial Revolution (1960-1990s)—the age of computers, the digital revolution, and the knowledge economy (computerization, information technologies [IT] systems, and automation); and
- Fourth Industrial Revolution (2000 onward)—the age of technology and exponential technological fusion (physical, digital [cyber physical], and biological) (smart factories with web connectivity) in concert with never-before-seen societal transformation due to exponential evolutions in artificial and digital intelligence.



Source: Strategic Decision Solutions (Williams, 2019) used with permission

Figure 1 Four Industrial Revolutions

Ideologies and Paradigms

Pressure on families from this exponential, unprecedented progress is not going away—it is just getting worse. Even more challenging for home economics is that this progress took the damaging form of dominant ideologies that privilege everything *except* families (who are deemed useful *only* if they are contributing to the formal, paid economy as labourers, producers, or consumers).

Dominant Ideologies

The nine dominant ideologies shaping today's world include the (a) oppressive, invasive, top-down, corporate-led *globalization* driven by *capitalism* and *neoliberalism*; (b) rampant and relentless expansion of *consumerism*; (c) ubiquitous *technologic* innovations happening at a daunting and exponential pace; (d) seeping and steeping of *patriarchy* and *social Darwinism* into our collective cultural psyche; and (e) unanticipated, rapid emergence of religious and political *conservatism* and *fundamentalism* (see Table 1 drawn from Donovan, 1997; Eaton, 1996; Elgin & Drew, 1997; Marsden & Littler, 1999; McGregor, 2008b, 2019b; McGregor et al., 2008; Riley, 1990). As a tip, most ideologies and paradigms end with these suffixes: *ism* (doctrines); *archy* (where power is vested); *ion* (denotes action); *ity* (denotes a state or condition); *al* (like, related to); and *ic* (having to do with) (Harper, 2023). Respectively, examples include capitalism, patriarchy, globalization, modernity (the Age of Ideologies), transactional, and mechanistic.

Table 1 Dominant Ideologies

Ideology	Details
Top-down Globalization	Economic interdependence of nations worldwide facilitated by technological innovations (telecommunications, transportation, and international financial centers and transactions), less nationalism, unrestricted free trade, global markets, outsourcing and offshore production, powerful corporations and weaker governments, and the inherent undermining of cultures, languages, and communities.
Capitalism	Economic ideology that values economic self-interest, profit, wealth accumulation, economic growth, investments, production, technological progress, and international trade agreements for economic unity of the elite. Resources are privately owned and used to accumulate private wealth, power, and position. Depends on wages for labourers, commodities for consumers, and profit for capitalists (producer).
Neoliberalism	Privileges anything that minimizes government intervention in the economy; individualism (self-interest, personal success); privatization (public services provided by for-profits); decentralization (devolve public services to local levels); deregulation (remove or minimize laws, regulations, restrictions to business); and laissez-faire markets (nominal role for government in business, finances, trade, and workers' lives—just enough to ensure competition, sanctity of contracts [transactions], property ownership, and wealth accumulation).
Consumerism	Inculcates the values of the Western consumer lifestyle on a global scale. It is a set of beliefs and values wherein people believe their human worth is best created and personal happiness best achieved through excessive consumption and materialism (accumulation of possessions and experiences [services]). Consumerism is the crux of capitalism.
Technologic	Industrial application of scientific knowledge for practical purposes; a branch of knowledge dealing with the creation and use of technical means (all sorts of machines, materials, skills, and processes) and their interrelation with life, society, and the environment. Scientific-technological methods and tools can both improve and worsen the human condition.
Patriarchy	Societal, economic, educational, or political systems where men hold all the power and exert domination over women, children, and weaker men. Men are in the more powerful and prestigious positions where they exercise power and authority over everyone else. This power marginalizes and disempowers others creating an unhealthy and untenable dependency replete with inequities, inequalities, and outright harm.
Social Darwinism	Survival of the fittest with <i>fit</i> defined as those with the most reason and logic using it to make choices while cognizant of the consequences. <i>They</i> deserve to survive. If people cannot adapt without help, they are deemed unfit, and it is in society's interest to let them fail. That way, resources are not wasted. Society is better off without them and has the moral obligation to not help them.
Conservatism	Hold the past in reverence and view change with skepticism; justify maintaining the status quo of the ruling elite; conserve what exists; resist altering proven institutions and societal values; deep respect for authority, customs, and traditions.
Fundamentalism	This is the strong, unwavering attachment and adherence to any set of beliefs in the face of criticism or unpopularity. Religious text and dogma or political doctrines are interpreted literally and strictly. Determination to maintain ingroup and outgroup distinctions and reject diversity of opinions. People should live by the established fundamentals—strict core beliefs, which often cannot be substantiated with proof or reasoning.

Dominant Paradigms

Ideologies (blueprints for our culture) are societal-level *ideas* about what life should be like and how people should (re)act. In comparison, paradigms are people's thought patterns, habits of reasoning, and modes of interpretation that are informed by ideologies. Paradigms are patterns (mental instructions) that people turn to when thinking about something (McGregor, 2019b; Soleiman, 2018). Per Figure 2, the lens on the forehead represents the invisible, usually unquestioned, ideologies flooding into people's minds. The two lower lenses represent how people see the world through their paradigms (thought patterns), which, as noted, are established habits of thinking based on assumptions about the world, assumptions shaped by the beliefs in the ideologies (see Table 1). These paradigms profoundly affect how people respond to and interpret their encounters with the world. Text Box 2 shares an example of these three-lens glasses using an ideological camp and paradigmatic watchtower metaphor (McGregor, 2019b, p. 19).



Figure 2 Representation of Invisible Ideologies Flooding into the Mind. Source: Unidentified magazine advertisement, ca. 1995

Imagine that the people living in the camp are following the ideological cultural blueprint of Darwinism's survival of the fittest, competition for scarce resources (capitalism), and power extorted by a few men over the many (patriarchy). If the person standing in the watchtower values the same things, life in the camp will make complete *sense* to them. If, however, that person believes in different values, like collaboration, sharing, sustainability, and gendered power, the camp activities they observe will take on totally different meanings. They will *see* exploitation, waste, and oppression and be stymied as to how anyone could willingly live in that camp.

Text Box 2 Paradigms (Thought Patterns) at Work

Paradigms related to the dominant ideologies include positivism, empiricism, reductionism, relativism, materialism, transmissional and transactional perspectives, and the mechanistic worldview. People using these seven paradigms value scarcity, competition, efficiency, profit, wealth, self-interest, the win/lose approach to success, and individualism. They respect linearity (cause and effect), fragmentation, facts, mastery, categories, specializations, and quick fixes (see Table 2 drawn from Donovan, 1997; Eaton, 1996; Elgin & Drew, 1997; Marsden & Littler, 1999; McGregor et al., 2008).

Table 2 Dominant Paradigms

Paradigm	Details
Positivism	The only way we can be positive that something is true is if it was discovered using the scientific method. What you can't measure doesn't count (e.g., theology and metaphysics: intuition, wisdom, spiritual, faith, and religion). Knowledge gained through human senses rather than reasoning and logic is not valid. Thus, values, morals, and ethics are denied. Only knowledge gained by studying relationships between existing facts can be trusted. Whatever is necessary to find new facts and knowledge can be justified; the end justifies the means.
Empiricism	Theories intended to explain, predict, control, or understand the world are based only on scientific proof (scientists studied nature or other humans). Scientific results of controlled experiments and observations trump intuition or faith. Others can verify the truth (new knowledge) by replicating the experiment. All knowledge comes from scientific experiments and scientific observations. Any unscientific knowledge is illogical and unverifiable hence untrustworthy.
Reductionism	Assumes that complex things can be understood by breaking them down into their simpler parts. The thing is then described by describing each part instead of how the parts work together to create the whole thing. Reductionism leads to categories, labels, specializations, fragmentation, and loss of diversity, which feels like failure, exclusion, and voice not heard. It further assumes that entities of one kind can be systematically replaced with entities of another kind (e.g., that the life sciences can be reduced to the physical sciences; social Darwinism can be used to explain social behaviour—Darwin's theory actually pertained to biological evolution in nature not to social evolution).
Relativism	Relative means considered in relation to or compared to something else. Relativism holds that there is no absolute, unqualified truth. The truth is conditional and changes with the context; "Everything is relative." Knowledge, truth, and morals exist in relation to cultures, societies, and history. Applied to life, people are concerned with quick fixes and immediate gratification rather than long-term commitment or sustainability. People want a short-term advantage for their self-interest.
Materialism	The goal in life is to accumulate material objects (goods) and experiences (services) with these taken as evidence of social achievement and personal success, which is achieved through conspicuous consumption in a high-consumption culture. The latter are enabled by globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism.
Transmissional and transactional	Transmission refers to passing on or sending something from one person to another. Transactional refers to an exchange of one thing for another. The thing stays the same (unchanged) in both processes unlike transformational wherein both the thing and the people involved can undergo marked change in nature, form, character, and essence.
Mechanistic	Views the world as a machine, especially a mechanical clock that is winding down. Humans have no control over this process. To make time last as long as possible, we must focus on mastering the material world using technology, science, and consumption (materialism). Because things are winding down, we cannot let moral compunction get in the way of living as long as possible before the unavoidable end, no matter what we have to do (the end justifies the means thereby legitimizing top-down globalization, capitalism, and neoliberalism).

In summary, property ownership, dominance, profit, and competition are worthy values. Hence, women and children can be seen as chattel and are supposed to be dominated, profit comes before compassion, and competition trumps cooperation. It is thus alright to have schools couched in competition; alright for businesses to rip-off consumers, the weaker market player; alright for women and children to be abused and trafficked—they must have done something to deserve it; alright to exploit the environment to help the capitalist elite get richer by producing more things to consume; alright for politicians to cut welfare, housing, childcare, unemployment insurance, and so on for the fiscal good of the nation or to meet free trade conditions; alright for homelessness to prevail—they must have failed somehow; alright to have an unbreachable gap between the elite and the poor. ... The litany goes on (Lerner, 1986; Pendergast & McGregor, 2007).

What is worse is that these ideologies and paradigms impact individuals and families in a convergent conflation creating a profoundly hard-to-push-back-against dynamic. Indeed, to quote the Borg, it seems "Resistance is futile." But as Yoda and The Force would say, "Resist we must." It is my position that, instead of making excuses and lamenting our losses (fighting a war of attrition), home economics should be exposing and fighting the ideologies (ideas) that

affect how others view families and by association home economics. Until then, both remain undervalued.

Undervalued Family Social Institution

Bottom line—our sole reason for existing as a profession is to help individuals, families, and communities enhance and optimize their well-being and quality of life. Unfortunately, the prevailing ideologies only value families as workers and producers who earn wages or employ others or as consumers who spend to contribute to the economy thus ensuring economic progress. If families are not valued, then, by association, home economics is not valued either. It is that simple and that complex. It is thus sinfully easy for others to dismiss our profession and not support it (McGregor, 2008a). Our claim that home economics is needed now more than ever, when the aspect of society that we serve—families—is *not* valued, is futile and lost on the powerbrokers who are undervaluing (under estimating) and devaluing (depreciating) both.

The undervaluation and depreciation of families—**this** is why home economics is being cut from public schools. **This** is why home economics teacher education preparation programs are being cut at colleges and universities. **This** is why home economics graduate programs are not supported leaving a huge gap in our intellectual capital for the future. **This** is why.... Our only way forward is to *fight an ideological war*. The time has passed for excuses and reasons in response to attrition. Our counterarguments *must* change because these ideologies (ideas) are taking their toll on the family as a social institution.

To illustrate this point, consider that, when dealing with ideological fallout, extraordinary change in the *structure* of family units has occurred despite that families (no matter what they *look* like) must still fulfill six United Nations-sanctioned *functions* as a social institution (Sokalski, 1992) (see Table 3, McGregor, 2009, p. 63 used with permission). Single (lone) parent families struggle with Functions 1, 4, and 5. Dual income families (both parents working, often several jobs) may struggle with Function 3, 4, and 6. Childless couples may wrestle with Function 2 if they want children. Families living on social assistance likely struggle with Functions 1, 5, and 6. And so on for other family structures including blended or step (reconstituted) families, divorced families, common-law families, same-sex families, and grandparent families.

Table 3 Six Functions of Family as a Social Institution

1	<i>Emotional care and physical maintenance of group members and relatives.</i> Within healthy families, children, adults, and seniors all receive the care and support they need (e.g., food, shelter, clothing, protection). This support is provided for the healthy, sick, and people with disabilities.
2	<i>Addition of new members</i> through procreation or adoption as well as fostering and guardianship. Society renews itself through families. Families also <i>give name and legal status</i> to their members.
3	<i>Socialization and education of children into adult roles and responsibilities.</i> Families prepare children for life by teaching skills, values, and attitudes that equip them to learn, work, form friendships, and contribute to society. Children also socialize adult family members.
4	<i>Social control of members</i> (e.g., setting boundaries, disciplining, mentoring) and <i>protection</i> of family members against all forms of violence. This exercise yields the maintenance of order within a family and any groups external to it. Within families, individuals learn positive values and behaviors and receive criticism and lessons to mitigate negative ones. Sometimes family members have to be protected from each other.
5	<i>Production, consumption, exchange and distribution of goods and services.</i> Families provide for their own by consuming and producing goods and services. As they strive to fulfil their members' needs, they play a vital role in local and national economies by earning, spending, saving, investing, and giving money and in their roles as laborers and entrepreneurs.
6	<i>Maintenance of family morale and motivation</i> to ensure task performance both within the family and in other groups. Families provide the glue that holds society together and keeps it functioning. Beyond providing mere social control, families, through love and spiritual leadership (emotional caring and upbringing), inspire, nurture, and support their members' self-esteem, self-understanding, and potential.

The only way we can redress the current inequitable treatment of families, and by association home economics, is to fight the right war—an ideological war (see Text Box 3, McGregor, 2021, p. 87). We need to message that families are the core democratic social and economic unit underpinning humanity. Home economists work *through* families to strengthen humanity and the world (McGregor & Piscopo, 2021). We need to help people hear, heed, and value *that* message.

Imagine a school board that is cutting a food program in favour of a commercial food program. Its justification is, “Why pay for two food programs?” Once female home economists take the time to figure out where the male administrative staff is coming from (i.e., their unarticulated patriarchal assumptions that are shaping their decisions and actions), it is easier to articulate arguments that support the home economics food program. We have to question the administration’s assumptions about food—lifestyle, home, and food are difficult to quantify, *but* commercial and food are hard and measurable hence more defensible. To continue, we live in a world that values money and numbers not home and food. So, to any board members embracing patriarchy, it makes *complete* sense to value the commercial food program, even though they *may not even know why* they are leaning that way (again, ideological blinders). The home economist’s job is to help them see this. With that insight, it is easier to make different arguments supporting the home economics food program knowing one is going up against an ideology and not evil people. Once home economists have a better understanding of patriarchy’s invisible power, they can make it visible, which helps others hear our message.

Text Box 3 Illustration of Fighting the Ideological War

Exposing and Challenging Ideologies and Paradigms

I have been arguing that we are fighting *a war of attrition* when we should be fighting an *ideological war*. Paul Hawken (2010) shared a powerful sentiment that I now apply to home economics. If you ask any group of well-meaning home economists if they woke in the morning to fight the war of attrition as they justified home economics, most of them would not raise their hand. So—if they are doing it without intention, but they are doing it anyway—the idea must be embedded in their mind (ideologies and paradigms) thus *making* them do things instead of being something they *want* to do. That tells me their approach can be critically explored, shifted, and reversed, and that conscientious home economists can *choose* to wage a different war—an ideological war.

To help with this task, I have prepared a roster of familiar scenarios encountered when fighting battles in the war of attrition, so home economists so inclined can *see* the ideologies and paradigms (see Tables 1 and 2) in action. These scenarios (battles) help expose the ideologies and paradigms underlying what others think, say, and feel about, and do to our profession. This exposure mitigates the distraction caused by other’s dismissal of (unworthy of consideration), disregard for (lack of attention), and disrespect for (lack of esteem and recognition) home economics, reactions emergent from enduring our litany of excuses and reasons in response to attrition. They cannot hear us anymore, if ever, because we failed to engage with ideologies and paradigms.

McGregor (2019b) addressed the changes in thought patterns (paradigm shifts) and inherent resistance that both home economists and other actors must experience for things to be different. In the meantime, we must first learn to recognize the ideologies and paradigms espoused in private and public discourse, so we can ferret them out, confront them, and deal with them constructively, so all parties benefit. “Ideologies matter in the home economics profession” (McGregor et al., 2008, p. 48).

- When home economists are forced to tick a box *other than* home economics to register themselves for grants, library holdings, conference presentations, United Nation’s sections, and so on, they are encountering reductionism. Despite being a

discipline in its own right, home economics is reduced to human sciences, social sciences, natural sciences, and so on.

- Being told by university administrators that the home economics department is being closed with some of the individual parts farmed out to other, allegedly more worthy existing faculties, colleges or departments is an example of patriarchy (where power is vested), reductionism (absorbed by something else), and Social Darwinism (i.e., home economics is not fit enough to survive, so don't waste any more resources on it).
- The incremental weakening of home economics program offerings in educational institutions (reflecting a lack of administrative support to sustain and protect them) is evidence of patriarchy, capitalism, the technologic ideology, and the mechanistic world view (i.e., save the rest of the school by sacrificing home economics—the end justifies the means). Social Darwinism is also evident in that administrators view home economics as not fit to survive, so don't waste resources on it.
- Being forced to accept the hiring of non-home economists to avoid losing paid positions or an entire program is an example of reductionism (i.e., home economics can be reduced to sociology, marketing, child psychology, physical education, health, or technology). Although home economics is interdisciplinary and integrated, administrators who value fragmentation and specialization (reductionism) rather than holism still privilege individual disciplines. They are easier to quantify (positivism). In a mechanistic world, the end justifies the means.
- Being told that home economics is redundant and expensive, and that students can learn its content in other, allegedly more worthy subjects, departments, colleges, or faculties, is an example of (a) the reduction of home economics; (b) relativism (quick fix to bolster staff complements in other faculties—the end justifies the means); and (c) capitalism (changes made in the name of efficiency, competition, scarcity, and profit). This is also an example of the (d) transmissional paradigm wherein administrators erroneously assume that home economics content can be moved to another subject areas with no loss or change entailed.
- Being told that home economics is not valuable because it is an applied, *soft* science is an example of positivism (too hard to quantify) and patriarchy (home economics practitioners are mostly women). Our counterarguments that home economics is both soft (applied) and hard (basic) science *by design*, and that it is interdisciplinary, are rejected because of empiricism, positivism, and materialism (fragmentation, privileged disciplines, especially STEM [Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics]).
- Closing a home economics food program (that enables families) but funding a commercial food program (that profits businesses) is an example of capitalism and patriarchy. The same goes for closing a clothing and textiles program but allowing an industrial design and merchandising program to continue. Child studies might be cancelled, but a commercial day-care business program is supported.
- Cancelling food labs in public schools (because labs are too expensive to run) is an example of capitalism (efficiency and profit), patriarchy (low value of home and family who benefit from students learning about food), and relativism (a short-term gain and fiscal quick fix for the school board). In these scenarios, the science labs are rarely shut down and are often further funded to support the STEM movement (McGregor, 2019a).
- Closing entire home economics programs in public schools (food and nutrition, clothing and textiles, housing, family dynamics, child studies, human development,

consumption, and resource management), but leaving science, reading, mathematics, technology, and career courses in place, is an example of positivism, patriarchy, and globalization. It reflects a total lack of respect for the family as a social institution while privileging other social institutions: the science community, economic system, labour market, political system, and education system.

- Dismantling home economics curricula and placing the dredges in technology and career programs is an example of the technologic ideology, capitalism, globalization, and patriarchy (industry is male dominated). However, something is *not* always better than nothing when that something (i.e., home economics) has been diluted and lost its potency.
- Basing the ‘bring back home economics movement’ on the premise that teaching food and nutrition (nothing else) will help fight obesity and avoid associated expensive health problems (Pendergast, 2017; Smith, 2016) is an example of capitalism, neoliberalism, and patriarchy. It is also a reflection of globalization in that Big Pharma and private hospitals will save money, boost their profits, and bolster their competitive edge. Also, home economics must be more than food and nutrition if it is to help people improve their well-being and quality of life. Eschewing the other elements of family life is patent reductionism.

Conclusion

The war metaphor is often used as a rhetorical trope (figure of speech) for political effect especially when fighting *isms* like ideologies and paradigms (Childress, 2001). While acknowledging the moral dilemma of using war metaphors to make political points (Childress, 2001), it was effective for messaging that home economists must carefully choose how they respond to the future of home economics. The powerbrokers of the world do not value families as a social institution, meaning they do not value home economics either. Fighting this devaluation is an up-hill battle that requires a great deal of determination and effort. But it should be achievable if one fights the right war using the right weapons and strategies to gain advantages and defend and advance oneself to victory.

Home economics is especially affected by the overarching, longstanding, pervasive flaw in societal power dynamics in the form of undervalued families (except as producers, labourers, and consumers). Our very existence serves to enhance and optimize the well-being and quality of life of this social institution, which struggles to perform key functions (see Table 3) for the good of each other and humanity. If a hard-hitting metaphor can help home economists see ideologies and shift paradigms and strategies to articulate our *raison d’être* and why we matter, I make no apologies for resorting to this war-based message—**we are fighting the wrong war**. We need to shun the war of attrition and fight a war of ideologies—a war of ideas about home economics.

Author Biography

Sue L. T. McGregor



<https://orcid.org/0000-0002-4392-9608>

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

References

- Almond, G. A., Chodorow, M., & Pearce, R. H. (1982). *Progress and its discontents*. University of California Press.
- Childress, J. F. (2001). The war metaphor in public policy: Some moral reflections. In F. J. Carl (Ed.), *The leader's imperative: Ethics, integrity, and responsibility* (pp. 181-197). Purdue University Press.
- David, N. (2016, January 19). What is the fourth industrial revolution? *World Economic Forum Blog*.
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/01/what-is-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/>
- Dillman, R. (2000). *Ideology*.
<http://www.rdillman.com/HFCL/TUTOR/ComEnv/ComEnv3.html>
- Donovan, P. (1997). *Paradigms and decision-making frameworks. Managing Wholes*.
<http://managingwholes.com/holistic-management-1.htm>
- Duerst-Lahti, G. (1998, March 20-22). *Masculinism as governing ideology: Epistemological consequences* [Paper presentation]. Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting, Los Angeles, CA.
- Eaton, J. M. (1996). *Paradigms*. Nova Scotia Department of Health.
<http://www.chebucto.ns.ca/CommunitySupport/NCC/SCDEFJE.html>
- Elgin, D., & LeDrew, C. (1997). *Global consciousness change. Awakening Earth*.
https://duaneelgin.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/11/global_consciousness.pdf
- Harper, D. (2023). *Online etymology dictionary*.
<https://www.etymonline.com/>
- Hawken, P. (2010). *The ecology of commerce*. HarperCollins.
- Hepburn, H. (2022, May 11). Home economics 'disappearing' from some Scottish schools. *TES Magazine*.
<https://www.tes.com/magazine/news/secondary/home-economics-disappearing-some-scottish-schools>
- Johnson, P. M. (2005). *A glossary of political economy terms*. Auburn University.
<http://www.auburn.edu/~johnspm/gloss/ideology>
- Lerner, G. (1986). *The creation of patriarchy*. Oxford University Press.
- Marsden, D., & Littler, D. (1999). A dialectical approach to consumer research: Beyond positivism and postmodernism. *European Advances in Consumer Research*, 4, 341-346.
<https://www.acrwebsite.org/volumes/11100/volumes/e04/E-04>
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2008a). Family studies as an educational strategy [Keynote presentation]. *First National Conference on Family Studies*, Floriana, Malta.
<http://consultmcmgregor.com/documents/keynotes/malta-keynote-2008.pdf>
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2008b). Ideological maps of consumer education. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 32(5), 545-552.
<https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1470-6431.2008.00686.x>
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2009). Becoming family literate: A new construct and platform for practice. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 101(1), 60-66.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2015). The future of family and consumer sciences (FCS) and home economics: An international and intergenerational vignette. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 107(3), 9-17.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2019a). FCS, STEM, and STEAM: Two lines of inquiry. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 111(4), 35-48.
<https://doi.org/10.14307/JFCS111.4.35>
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2019b). Paradigms and normativity: What should FCS do in light of 21st century change? *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 111(3), 10-25.
[doi:http://dx.doi.org/10.14307/JFCS111.3.1](http://dx.doi.org/10.14307/JFCS111.3.1)
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2021). Meme uptake strategy for re-invigorating home economics: HecMemes. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 14(2), 80-93.
https://www.ifhe.org/fileadmin/user_upload/e_Journal/Vol_14_2/7-McGregor_Meme_Uptake_Strategy.PDF
- McGregor, S. L. T., Pendergast, D., Seniuk, E., Eghan, F., & Engberg, L. (2008). Choosing our future: Ideologies matter in the home economics profession. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 1(1), 48-68.
- McGregor, S. L. T., & Piscopo, S. (2021). A caring professional continuum: Home economics working through families. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 14(2), 94-107.
https://www.ifhe.org/fileadmin/user_upload/e_Journal/Vol_14_2/P8_McGregor.pdf
- Pendergast, D. (2017, April 8-12). Home economics: Future proofing families for 21st century living [Keynote address]. *22nd Caribbean Home Economics Association Conference*, Montego Bay, Jamaica.
<http://caribbeanhomeeconomist.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/Keynote-Presentation-CAHE-Jamaica-2017-Prof-Donna-Pendergast.pdf>
- Pendergast, D., & McGregor, S. L. T. (2007). *Positioning the profession beyond patriarchy*. Kappa Omicron Nu.
http://www.kon.org/patriarchy_monograph.pdf

- Riley, J. L. (1990). *Moderate political ideologies: Liberalism and conservatism*. <http://jim-riley.org/libcons.htm>
- Smith, M. G. (2016). "Bring back home economics"? Challenging contested discourses on obesity. *Journal of Family & Consumer Sciences*, 108(4), 7-12. <https://doi.org/10.14307/JFCS108.4.7>
- Sokalski, H. J. (1992). *Family matters* [International Year of the Family Occasional Paper Series No. 1]. United Nations.
- Soleiman, M. (2018, July 16). Thought patterns: Paradigms. *Lateral Magazine*. <http://www.lateralmag.com/columns/paradigms/thought-patterns>
- Trailhead. (2022). *Module: The four industrial revolutions*. <https://trailhead.salesforce.com/en/content/learn/modules/learn-about-the-fourth-industrial-revolution/meet-the-three-industrial-revolutions>
- Williams, C. (2019, December 3). How the fourth industrial revolution will reshape risk management. *ERM Insights Blog*. <https://www.erm insightsbycarol.com/fourth-industrial-revolution-risk-manage>