

## A look inside *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years*

Sue L. T. McGregor

Mount Saint Vincent University, Halifax Nova Scotia Canada

### Abstract

*This paper focused on the recently launched book Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years (published by the Australian Academic Press, 2012). It aspired to entice people to delve into this one-of-a-kind collection of ideas about how to future proof the Home Economics profession, grounded in megatrends, and IFHE's position statement about the intent and focus of Home Economics. It identified eight themes, and teased out four to illustrate the intellectual potential of these future proofing ideas: philosophy of Home Economics, megatrend push back, changing families, and the history of Home Economics.*

**Keywords:** *future proofing, IFHE position statement, megatrends, Home Economics futures, convergent moments*

### Introduction

In 2012, a book about future proofing Home Economics was launched at the International Federation for Home Economics (IFHE) world congress in Australia. Edited by Donna Pendergast, Sue McGregor and Kaija Turkki, the book is titled *Creating Home Economics Futures: The Next 100 Years* (published by the Australian Academic Press). The editors anticipated that the book would 'offer an exciting opportunity to contribute to the thinking associated with the future of the Home Economics profession' as it enters the next 100 years (Pendergast, McGregor, & Turkki, 2012, p. iii). This paper shares some insights into the large ideas contained within this collection, ideas intended to 'stimulate creative, deeply intellectual and philosophical thinking about [Home Economics] futures' (p. iii). The paper is an unabashed attempt to entice readers to explore, ponder and reflect on the ideas in the book, perchance leading to new approaches to their future practice.

The book opens with a discussion of Home Economics:

*being at a 'convergent moment'... a time of opportunity where several key societal factors are occurring at the same time... providing a moment of alignment... that, when taken together, provide an unprecedented opportunity to re-vision the Home Economics profession.*  
(Pendergast et al., 2012, p. 1)

*Convergence* is a term describing several lines of thought, trends or events coming together, lines that are not running parallel to each other, yet are still inclined to come together from different directions so they eventually meet. With a deep respect for the power of convergence, Home Economists are asked to appreciate that, when taken together, these

factors can be seen as catalysts for major reform, making this a defining moment for the profession (Pendergast, 2013) –*home economicsvergence* (see Figure 1).

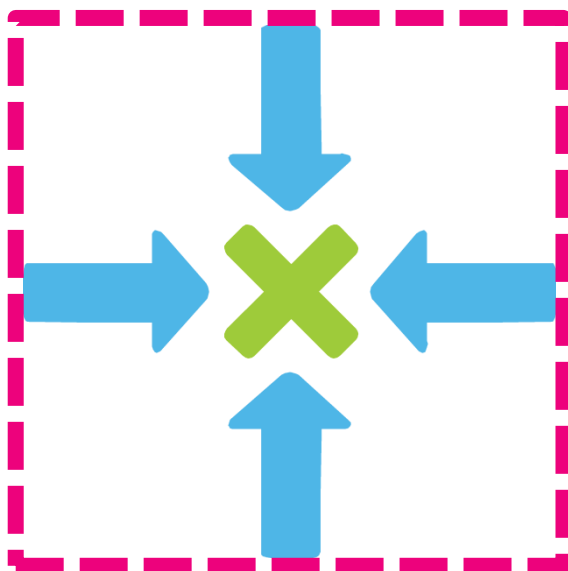


Figure 1 Home economicsvergence

### Conceptual anchors for the book

Three concepts served as anchors for this book: (a) the idea of future-proofing the profession, (b) IFHE's (2008) position statement about Home Economics, and (c) the notion of megatrends set out in the stimulus chapter, all of which were used to solicit manuscript proposals for the collection. Each author(s) was expected to address some combination of these three concepts.

#### Future proofing

As explained by McGregor (2011), when a profession is future proofed, it is protected against being superseded by unanticipated future developments. It is better guaranteed to not be taken over, replaced, surpassed or displaced. A future proofed profession can handle the future(s) because members of the profession have taken steps now in order to avoid having to make radical changes to their practice in order to remain viable in the future. This protected profession will not stop being effective just because something newer or more effective comes along to try and replace it. Indeed, a future proofed profession is strategically planned so it can remain effective even, especially, when things change. Pendergast (2009) explained that future proofing entails 'anticipating future developments to minimise negative impacts and optimise opportunities' (p. 517). Future proofing the profession is an elusive process and a challenging task, but necessary to ensure a sustainable profession (Pendergast, 2008).

#### IFHE Position Statement

In its centennial year, IFHE (2008) released a Position Statement titled *Home Economics in the 21st Century*, affectionately called *he21c* (see Pendergast, 2008). Pendergast explained

that *he21c* locates the profession within contemporary times and serves as a platform for IFHE members that transcends geographical boundaries and cultures. The Position Statement asserts that the key imperative of the profession is to improve the world. It presumes Home Economists will be able to rise to this challenge when they exhibit three essential attributes: (a) a focus on fundamental needs and practical concerns of individuals and families in their everyday life; (b) the ability to integrate knowledge, processes and skills from many disciplines synthesised through inter and transdisciplinary inquiry; and (c) the ability to take critical, transformative and emancipatory action at all levels and sectors of society (Pendergast, 2008, 2013).

Furthermore, the *he21c* clarifies that Home Economics can be identified by its four main areas of practice, called Four Dimensions of Practice (see Figure 2). It is an academic discipline that educates new scholars into the profession, conducts research, and creates new knowledge and ways of thinking. It focuses on the arena of everyday living where people’s basic human needs are met and where people develop human growth and potential. Third, Home Economics is a curriculum area that teaches students how to discover and develop their capabilities by preparing them for life. Finally, Home Economics manifests in the societal arena where it influences and develops policy to enable families to achieve empowerment, wellbeing, transformation and sustainable futures (IFHE, 2008; Pendergast, 2008). In summary, the intent of Home Economics is to augment and advance the profession’s practitioner base and knowledge base; facilitate everyday living of the family as a social institution; prepare students (primary, secondary and tertiary) to engage with life; and, influence policy for the improvement of family life and, by association, humanity. Indeed, the editors of the book envisioned the profession as a key part of the future of humankind (Pendergast et al., 2012).

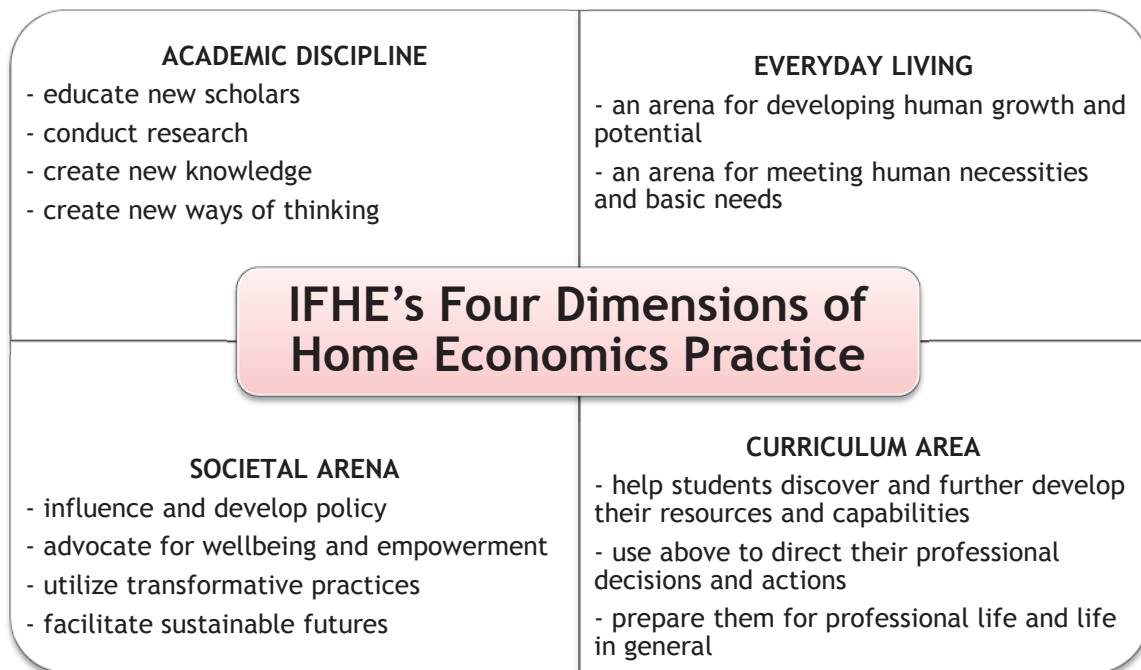


Figure 2 IFHE's four dimensions of Home Economics practice

### Megatrends stimulus chapter

Drawing on future projections released by the Copenhagen Institute for Future Studies (CIFS) (see Anderson et al., 2006), the editors prepared a stimulus chapter (Pendergast et al., 2012, pp. 1-11), intended to provoke and elicit responses from potential contributors to the collection. It contained, among other things, 10 megatrends envisioned by the CIFS. McGregor (2012, p.24) explained that

*a trend is a general tendency or direction for conditions or events, often pertaining to instances when something veers off in a different direction or experiences a change in momentum. Mega is Greek megas, great or large. Megatrends are large movements that become great forces in societal development; they define the present world and have the potential to shape the future. Well known examples of megatrends include globalization, aging and climate change.*

The 10 megatrends profiled in the stimulus chapter represented

*great forces in societal development that will very likely affect the future in all areas over the next 10-20 years. [They are] a collection of trends, patterns of economic, social or environmental activity that will change the way people live and the science and technology products they demand.*  
(Pendergast et al., 2012, pp. 2-3)

The editors invited authors to draw upon these 10 megatrends as they developed their chapters. In fact, they suggested that these megatrends can be used as a method to strategically future proof the profession.

In short, the world's population is rapidly aging. Globalisation from the top down now characterises fast paced global interconnections. The juggernaut of technological innovation relentlessly rolls on in the form of information technology, biotechnology, nanotechnology and energy technology. The world is becoming more prosperous, especially due to economic growth as measured by Gross Domestic Product (GDP). Human needs are more often being met by commercialization in private markets. A shift is occurring away from collective societal norms to personal individualization. People's health, wellbeing and environments are being compromised. The pace of change is accelerating, and this pace is exacerbated by the megatrend of organizing and connecting via technology-mediated networks. Finally, nearly half of the world's population now live in urban areas. This urbanization trend comes with its own set of problems, interconnected with the other nine megatrends.

### Intellectual contributions from the book

The book contains 19 chapters from 35 authors based in 16 countries. Authors hailed from Europe (45%,  $n = 16$ ), Australia/Asia (25%,  $n = 9$ ), the Americas (15%,  $n = 5$ ) and Africa (15%,  $n = 5$ ). For example, there were contributions from Brazil, Malta, the Netherlands, South Africa, Japan, the Scandinavian countries, Germany, Australia, Canada and the United States. Virtually all of the authors were women university professors or lecturers. There were no authors from the Caribbean, the Middle East, India or Russia. This profile generates a

predominately gendered, Western-oriented perspective of Home Economics futures (except for the hegemonic-challenging contributions from Africa and China), and begs the question of what a non-Western, non-gendered orientation might look like (a project for the future).

A preliminary analysis of the overall content of the book revealed eight themes (see Table 1). Others are encouraged to read the book and suggest different themes. The following text profiles four of these themes as a way to illustrate the intellectual and philosophical power entrenched in this global collection of ideas about how to future proof Home Economics: philosophy of Home Economics, megatrend push back, changing families, and Home Economics stories.

Table 1 Major themes housed within the 19 chapters

Theme	Chapters
Push back against 10 megatrends in stimulus chapter	2, 11, 13, 15
Philosophy of Home Economics	1, 3, 4, 9, 14, 17, 19, 20
Perceptions of Home Economics	7
History of Home Economics	5, 6
Development and growth	6, 8, 10, 16, 17, 18
Changing families, homes and households	12
Transdisciplinarity	14
Japan—after the earthquake (re-conceiving sustainability)	19

### Philosophical innovations

Half of the chapters contained content pursuant to the philosophy of Home Economics, an exciting development considering the editors hoped to see ‘deeply intellectual and philosophical thinking’ (Pendergast et al., 2012, p. iii). This theme is evidenced by several quotes from the book:

‘I am calling for a philosophical conversation, and the deep philosophical study of Home Economics phenomenon, discipline and science’ (Heinilä, 2012, p. 103).

‘Home Economist professionals must mindfully assess the philosophical foundations... of home economics’ (Molokwu & Kembe, 2012, p. 215).

‘There should be more philosophical discussion, reflection and inquiry in the field of Home Economics. Professionals are invited to investigate the essence of Home Economics alongside other important questions. The philosophical ground of Home Economics should be strengthened’ (Heinilä, 2012, p. 109).

To further illustrate this philosophical theme, Turkki (2012) tendered a collection of ‘new landscapes and new ‘language’ to communicate and to reposition us in relation to others, other professional communities, and the world” (p. 38). She shared these philosophical ideas in seven diagrams (seven conceptual frameworks) with attendant narratives, anticipating that Home Economists can learn from these ideas as they strive to ‘create meaningful futures’ (p. 50).

Heinilä (2012), quoted above, suggested phenomenology as a new philosophical lens for the profession. She used the map metaphor to suggest that, if we want to philosophically future proof the profession, we need new *waypoints*. These are sets of coordinates or reference points that help people navigate a new area, to find their way. She proposed three new philosophical waypoints: aesthetic experience, bodily being, and enfolded everyday life (see also Heinilä, 2014).

As a final example, Kolodinsky (2012) advocated for Home Economists to turn to transdisciplinarity and complexity thinking to augment its long standing holistic paradigm. She argued that, as multifaceted generalists, Home Economists are more than ready to draw on transdisciplinary approaches as they lead diverse teams to study and address the complexities of everyday life. To mirror Heinilä's (2012) suggestion, Home Economists would use many new waypoints, including boundary crossing and blurring, hybridity, non-linearity, situated practice, and integrative processes.

### **Megatrend push back**

Another theme was the major push back against the 10 proposed megatrends. McGregor (2012) critiqued them for not referring to families, for limiting their context to the 34 OECD countries (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), and for their neo-liberal, capitalistic, top-down notion of globalization. To counter these criticisms, she developed 10 counter forces couched within a life-centric perspective (e.g., localization, the commons, deceleration, kinship networks, and counter urbanization).

Jarva (2012) took issue with the *megatrend* concept, countering it with the *Mega Crisis* approach (see Halal & Marien, 2011). Jarva explained that the megatrend approach presumes continuity and space for planning, while the *Mega Crisis* approach presumes discontinuity, with little time for proactive actions. These two approaches challenge Home Economists in different ways. If we embrace the *trend* approach, we can assume there is time for long-range planning, strategizing and anticipation of opportunities. On the other hand, the *crisis* approach narrows our focus to the basic survival strategies of individuals and families in their everyday life (for example, see Otake et al.'s (2012) chapter on family life in Japan after the 2011 earthquake and the Fukushima nuclear disaster). Jarva leaves us with a pressing dilemma: 'The great challenge for Home Economics... is: can it tackle the problems both in a state of a *Mega Crisis* and in the long-term continuity of different trends' (2012, p. 154).

Lorek and Whalen (2012) claimed that the CIFS megatrend projections are far too optimistic. They urged Home Economists to paint a different picture of the selected megatrends and to go further than suggested by Anderson et al. (2006). Upon examining the 10 megatrends, Lorek and Whalen arrived at a less optimistic, different estimation about the future. They reframed technology and tendered an additional megatrend, climate change, painting compellingly negative pictures. Within this critical perspective, they urged Home Economists to 'future proof itself [by] helping individuals and families deal with the fallout and the opportunities pertinent to these and other megatrends' (p. 173).

### Changing families, homes and households

Several chapters focused on the changing nature of families, but most compelling was Janhonen-Abreuquah's (2012) discussion of transnational families, a term that recognises the global megatrend for migration (i.e., one out of every 35 people worldwide is an international migrant, and half of them are women). The term *transnational* 'acknowledges that it is possible for people to belong to several locations at the same time, and thus have a number of identities [in the new homeland and in the country of origin]' (p. 133). She explained that, in transnational families, the concept of home changes. It is not just a place of origin or current residence, but is also a place of belonging and identification that changes as an individual's life trajectory changes. Furthermore, everyday life for transnational families now exists in several places. More compelling is that they live some or all of their time separated but are somehow able to create a sense of 'family-hood', a form of survival unit (p. 133).

Janhonen-Abreuquah (2012) also coined the term *transnational everyday life* (p. 134) and tendered a hot-air balloon flight metaphor as a way for Home Economists to approach working with and studying transnational families. This metaphor allows Home Economists to see migrant families from a dynamic point of view. These families are presumed to be able to influence their own activities, appreciating that the family (the hot air balloon) does not fly haphazardly but is also not under full control.

*There is a need to see [transnational, migrant] family members as active agents who are to some extent capable of influencing their own activities. This model also helps to visualise the very essence of transnational families. There are both local and global forces which prevent as well as facilitate daily actions and accommodations.*

*(Janhonen-Abreuquah, 2012, p. 135)*

### Home Economics stories

The authors of two chapters shared very compelling stories of the emergence of Home Economics in their country and the challenges now faced because of this heritage. Chen (2012) traced the origins of Home Economics in the People's Republic of China. She explained that Home Economics in China has experienced different stages of development from its introduction, total cancellation, and recent, ongoing reconstruction. Home Economics' history is closely related to the nation's modernization process and with the evolution of women's social status. In 1914, after the centuries-long feudal system ended, and after Home Economics was introduced into China by Western missionaries, the Chinese government sent women overseas to the United States to be trained as Home Economists. After the government changed in 1949, Home Economics was cancelled at all levels because it did not meet the needs of the times. Nearly 40 years later, in the midst of China's modernization process, Home Economics is reappearing in some higher education institutions but is not being taught by trained Home Economists. 'The reconstruction of Home Economics is still in its infancy. To aid this process, Home Economics needs to remain connected with the world' (Chen, 2012, p. 73).

Future proofing Home Economics in China faces many challenges mainly because ‘the value and significance of Home Economics is greatly overlooked by Chinese mainstream thinkers’ (Chen, 2012 p. 69). She concluded that the discipline needs to be formally and intentionally developed in China. Right now, it lacks a clear mission, purpose, body of knowledge, and research paradigms. Home economists in China need to develop a professional academic team, set up formal communication mechanisms, expand the academic institutional exchange platform, and cultivate more professional talents.

Miles away, on another continent, Mberengwa and Mthombeni (2012) tell a similar tale of the origins of Home Economics in Africa. They too recounted how Home Economics was introduced into African nations by Western missionaries. Starting around the 1950s, African teachers were trained abroad, mostly in England, Canada and the United States. They then returned to teach in African institutions. As a result, the content of most Home Economics higher education and public school programmes in Africa reflects a strong Western influence. The relevancy of these programmes has oftentimes been criticised as not being Africentric.

To address this situation, Mberengwa and Mthombeni (2012) tendered an Africentric approach for teaching Home Economics in higher education. They proposed an *ideal curriculum for Home Economics in Africa*, organised using the four dimensions of Home Economics from IFHE’s (2008) Position Statement. To illustrate, an Africentric curriculum would (a) uphold core African values and strengths; (b) rethink, redefine and resuscitate core African family values; and, (c) embrace the cultural uniqueness of African peoples. These and other Africentric innovations are intended to silence the longstanding, inappropriate Western influence as well as address the pressing issues faced by African families in their local context. Other decolonised nations may be inspired to use this approach to future proof Home Economics in their contexts.

## Discussion and conclusion

This paper aspired to entice people to delve into this one-of-a-kind collection of ideas about how to future proof the Home Economics profession, grounded in megatrends, and IFHE’s (2008) position statement about the intent and focus of Home Economics. It identified eight themes and teased out four to illustrate the intellectual potential of these future proofing ideas: philosophy of Home Economics, megatrend push back, changing families, and the history of Home Economics.

Many other ideas entrenched in the book are worth exploring, including:

- (a) the potential of the solidarity economy and the creative economy;
- (b) communitarian development;
- (c) families during times of unrest and crises/distress;
- (d) capacity building, both for families and the profession (see Piscopo and Mugliett’s (2012) model intended as a future proofing strategy); and,
- (e) Home Economics as folksonomy (tag clouds) (see also Pendergast, 2013).



Kolodinsky (2012) developed a deliciously creative approach (pun intended) to food as a system: *food cents*, *food sense* and *food scents* (drawing on every day, historical and scientific knowledge). Food cents refers to the economic vitality of the world's food system. Food sense pertains to environmental health, and food scents accounts for social equity and human health. Other compelling word-smithing in the book included the wellbeing of *the people*, a flourishing life, and sustainable feeding.

The 34 authors in this collection presented diverse and challenging ideas about future proofing the profession, strengthened by 'an unexpected but welcomed synergy ...that gives us hope for a powerful and sustainable future' (Pendergast et al., 2012, p. iii). 'The question of understanding futures has become paramount to Home Economics' (Jarva, 2012, p. 145). Encouragingly, this book shares compelling insights into how Home Economists envisioned the profession's future, as it is informed by transformational, accelerating and far reaching change.

The take-away message from this collection is that we have to change ourselves in order to be part of the future of humankind. The profession is in a very unique position of strength to meet the challenges of humanity (akin to *Home Economicsvergence*), and we must strategically future proof ourselves in order to capitalise on this convergent moment in time. As evidenced in this collection, there is no shortage of ideas about how to achieve this necessary intellectual, philosophical and practical strength.

## Biography

Sue L. T. McGregor PhD Professor Emerita sue.mcgregor@msvu.ca

## References

- Anderson, K., Kruse, M., Persson, H., Mogensen, K., & Eriksen, T. (2006). *10 megatrends toward 2020*. Copenhagen, Denmark: Copenhagen Institute of Future Studies. Retrieved from <http://www.cifs.dk/scripts/artikel.asp?id=1469>
- Chen, P. (2012). History and potential of home economics in the People's Republic of China. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 62-74). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Halal, W., & Marien, M. (2011). Global megacrisis. *Journal of Futures Studies*, 16(2), 95-165.
- Heinilä, H. (2012). Writing new maps. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 101-110). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Heinilä, H. (2014). Enriching home economics philosophy with phenomenological insights: Aesthetic experiences, bodily being, and enfolded everyday life. *Kappa Omicron Nu FORUM*, 19(1), <http://www.kon.org/archives/forum/19-1/heinila.html>
- International Federation for Home Economics. (2008). *IFHE position statement: Home economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century*. Bonn, Germany: Author. Retrieved from [http://he.ifhe.org/index.php?eID=tx\\_nawsecuredl&u=388&file=fileadmin/user\\_upload](http://he.ifhe.org/index.php?eID=tx_nawsecuredl&u=388&file=fileadmin/user_upload)

/redaktion-  
he/Health/IFHE\_Position\_Statement\_2008.pdf&t=1401319567&hash=e15bc16aaef4f15  
5eb795bb832a45fbc

- Janhonen-Abuquah, H. (2012). Everyday life of families in the global world. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 132-142). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Jarva, V. (2012). Home economics, mega-crises and continuity. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 143-156). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Kolodinsky, J. (2012). A systems approach to food future proofs the home economics profession. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 157-169). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Lorek, S., & Whalen, S. (2012). Sustainable consumption through an environmental lens: Challenges and opportunities for home economics. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T. & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics future: The next 100 years* (pp. 170-181). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Mberengwa, L., & Mthombeni, F. (2012). Envisioning an African-centric higher education home economics curriculum for the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 195-206). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2011). Home economics in higher education: Pre professional socialization. *International Journal of Consumer Studies*, 35(5), 560-568.
- McGregor, S. L. T. (2012). Bringing a life-centric perspective to influential megatrends. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* pp. 24-37). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Molokwu, N., & Kembe, E. (2012). Food security, street food and family insecurity in Nigeria: Repositioning home economics in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 207-217). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Otake, M., Miyano, M., Sasai, K., Sugiyama, K., Ito, Y., & Arai, N. (2012). What did we learn from the 3-11 disaster and how do we need to reconsider a sustainable life? In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 218-227). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Pendergast, D. (2008). Introducing the IFHE Position Statement. *International Journal of Home Economics*, 1(1), 3-7.
- Pendergast, D. (2009). Generational theory and home economics: Future proofing the profession. *Family and Consumer Sciences Research Journal*, 37(4), 504-522.
- Pendergast, D. (2013). An appetite for convergence, megatrends and big ideas. *Journal of ARAHE*, 20(2), 57-65.

- Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.) (2012). *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years*. Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Piscopo, S. & Mugliett, K. (2012). Capacity building in the home economics profession: The Maltese experience. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 228-240). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.
- Turkki, K. (2012). Home economics: A forum for global learning and responsible living. In Pendergast, D., McGregor, S. L. T., & Turkki, K. (Eds.), *Creating home economics futures: The next 100 years* (pp. 38-51). Queensland, Australia: Australian Academic Press.