

Meme Uptake Strategy for Re-invigorating Home Economics: *HEcMemes*

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Abstract

The bring back home economics movement has been judged harmful to home economics, because it demeans the profession and denigrates its image—despite best intentions of those outside the profession. This paper concerns the process of dealing with the fallout of this movement, and it does so from the perspective of creating positive home economics memes (sounds like genes). After profiling a range of re-words used in our literature about moving home economics forward and describing memes and their role in perpetuating the spread of cultural knowledge, the paper introduces and then applies Karafiath and Brewer’s meme uptake strategy model. This involves dealing with immune-deficiency, parasitic and hostile memes while developing clear communications about defining and symbiotic memes. Home economists have to take full responsibility for messaging about the profession including that generated outside and within. One way to achieve this is to reimagine an invigorated profession and communicate this vision using affirmative HEcMemes while employing the meme uptake strategy model.

KEYWORDS: BRING BACK HOME ECONOMICS; CULTURAL KNOWLEDGE; FUTURE PROOFING; MEMES; TAG CLOUDS; FAMILY AND CONSUMER SCIENCES

Introduction

Nickols and Kay (2015) strongly argued that “home economics¹ knowledge and experience could contribute to preventing and solving many current problems” (p. 3). They asserted that “the perception that home economics has vital information is reflected in news media as ‘bring back home ec’” (p. 3). Conversely, Smith (2015, 2016) argued that the recent bring back home economics movement, emergent from well-intended actors from outside the profession, is actually causing us harm. After collecting and analyzing 39 such articles (2010-2014), she remarked that “I collected these articles in search of allies... Initially it was heart warming to see articles that were actually supporting our profession. Now I am not so sure” (Smith, 2015, p. 143).

After a critical discourse analysis of this collection, Smith (2016) identified the obesity epidemic and the learn-to-cook imperative as the two dominant discourses. Similarly, Pendergast reported that a 2017 Google Scholar search for *bring back home economics* yielded 128 artifacts (2010-2017) increasing from two in 2010 to nearly 30 in 2015. The majority were published in reputable academic journals (52 different venues), and the main topics again were *food*, *cook*, and *nutrition education* with reference to *obesity* (Pendergast, 2017, see tag cloud at p. 86). This movement has not slowed down. A November 2020 Google Search yielded 45 hits for 2019-2020 albeit many referenced Lichtenstein and Ludwig’s (2010) *Journal of the American Medical Association* article whose title contained the exact phrase *bring back home economics*.

Smith (2016) asserted that pervasive attendant discourses about obesity and cooking “demean the profession” and further denigrate its image, because they “reinforce the ‘stitching and stirring’ stereotype” (p. 9) and make our work look shallow and superficial. She maintained that these discourses also ignore the pervasive underlying ideological roots wherein structural factors, social

¹ The message herein also applies to home economics by other names: family and consumer sciences, family studies, human ecology, home sciences, home ecology, household sciences, consumer sciences

institutions and social practices impede people's best intentions of trying to eat a healthy diet. The *bring back home economics* rhetoric ends up blaming individuals instead of the system. Being associated with this subliminal message harms the profession (Smith, 2016).

This paper concerns the process of dealing with the fallout of this movement and it does so from the perspective of creating positive home economics memes (sounds like genes). After profiling a range of re-words used in our literature about moving home economics forward and describing memes and their role in spreading cultural ideas, the paper introduces and then applies Karafiath and Brewer's (2013) meme uptake strategy to home economics.

Re-words about Reinvigorating Home Economics

Etymologically, *re* is a word-forming element meaning back to an original place through a process that usually entails a sense of undoing and building anew. The result can be again, once more, back, a turn (Harper, n.d.-b). This section reports on a range of ideas or *re*-words used in our own literature to describe how home economics can move forward and future proof itself: renew, rethink, remake, reinvent, and reimagine (also resurgence, refuse, reconsider, revive) (see Table 1). Some quick perusal shows that while renew means bring back to an original state (basically), the intent of the other re-words is to create something different by effecting change usually through a process of creation and reconceptualization.

Table 1 Re-words About Reinvigorating Home Economics

Renew	(a) resume after an interruption, (b) extend the validity of something for a further period or (c) exchange something that is old or not working with something new of the same kind
Rethink	reconsider something with a mind to change it
Remake	cause to come about again but it will be different; a redo or a makeover through an act of creation
Reinvent	start with something that already exists and make it over into a different form; to redo completely; also, revive or bring into use again or make valid again
Reimagine	form or conceptualize a mental image of something by reinterpreting it in a new way or seeing it in a different light (usually more positive)

The profession must be invigorating (i.e., have strength, vitality, and relevance); if this starts to slip or is perceived as such, we must act. However, not everyone agrees on what that action looks like; hence the range of re-words (see Table 1 and the following section). Regardless, everyone's intent is to future proof the profession by making sure it remains viable and legitimate for centuries to come regardless of specific global crises facing humanity (Pendergast, 2017).

Renew

In reaction to the bring back home economics rhetoric, Deagon (2012) claimed that home economics does not need to be resurrected or brought back from the dead, because it *never* died. She conceded that we *do* need renewal as we continue to struggle with legitimacy and recognition and strive to be taken seriously. Dictionary definitions of *renew* (Oxford University Press, n.d.-a) include:

- a. resume after an interruption
- b. extend the validity of something for a further period, or
- c. exchange something that is old or not working with something new of the same kind.

Renew seems to be an appropriate verb for our situation. We never went away, but our presence has been diminished, diluted and marginalized (Nickols & Kay, 2015; Pendergast, 2001; Stage & Vincenti, 1997). In the meantime, somehow, we are now perceived relevant but only when we teach cooking and nutrition to avoid obesity. Everything else we stand for is dismissed.

After completing her analysis of the bring back home economics coverage, Smith (2016) dug even deeper, claiming we must avoid the other-imposed stigma of framing "home economics as a form of social control and home economists as prescriptive 'experts' [who are] agents in the 'regulation of

deviant populations’” (p. 9). The latter refer to individuals who allegedly break social norms by eating an unhealthy diet and becoming obese. If home economics is brought back, members of society can turn to us as the experts imposing dictates on healthy eating.

Smith (2016) eschewed this narrow, prescriptive stereotype of the profession. Pendergast (2001) did as well, suggesting that we rock the boat and combine technical how-to thoughts with political and ethical responsibility to society and humanity. We must refuse to conform to restrictive stereotypes. Smith urged the profession to “demonstrate ways in which our research and pedagogies can move beyond simplistic understandings and simple solutions” (2016, p. 11).

Rethink

Like Deagon (2012), Pendergast (2001, p. 208) agreed that we need renewal, but proposed instead that this should happen through “re-thinking the thinking that has already been done” in and about the field. Rethink means reconsidering something with the intent to change it (i.e., thinking about it very carefully; paying close attention to it) (Oxford University Press, n.d.-b). Pendergast (2001) proposed that we reconsider home economics from the perspective of refusing to be marginalized; not clinging to the familiar; and pushing back against ideological, systemic oppression by being subversive (undermining established authority and power) and then outright overt (come out of the shadows). Pendergast and McGregor (2007) further addressed this idea in a monograph about home economics and patriarchy.

Like Pendergast (2001), Stage and Vincenti (1997) also named their book *Rethinking home economics*. They recognized that “home economics found itself increasingly beleaguered in the 1960s and 1970s [and] in the ensuing decades ... has continued to grapple with its stereotype of ‘stitching and stirring’” (pp. 12-13). They recommended that we reconsider (*rethink*) home economics by exploring how political ideologies that devalued women and their place in history had diminished opportunities for educated professional women to make a difference. In 1997, they maintained that moving home economics forward would require paying attention to gender-based problems (valuing women) while not consigning home economics to the margins again. In reality, home economics *is* mainly shaped by women, but it is focused on home, family and community *not* women.

Remake

More recently, Nickols and Kay (2015) named their book *Remaking home economics*. To remake means to cause to come about again, but it will be different; a redo or a make over through an act of creation (Anderson, 2014). Nickols and Kay (2015) recommended that we remake home economics by reflecting on the past as we accommodate a fast-changing global environment by being resourceful and innovative. Claiming that home economics has been remaking itself since its beginning 125 years ago, they asserted that it is especially germane in contemporary times because of its myriad specializations in combination with its holistic, interrelated perspective. Through this prism, the profession can come about again, just differently. They never doubted its continued currency.

Reinvent

In Finland, Tuomi-Gröhn (2008) advocated for reinventing home economics. Reinvent means to start with something that already exists and make it over into a different form; to redo completely. It can also mean revive or bring into use again or make valid again (Anderson, 2014). She and her colleagues said that rather than focusing on the *science* of achieving an optimal quality of life, we should instead address the art of meaning making and the *art* of making the everyday. Home economics should be reinvented, so that it does not privilege science and empiricism but instead values “the complexity of the everyday and everyday making” (Tuomi-Gröhn, 2008, p. 15) through an art (creative) lens. This—rather than assuming that the everyday means mundane and insignificant. The everyday work of families sustains humanity; also see McGregor’s (2012) work on the everyday and home economics.

Reimagine

Perhaps a better *re*-word is *reimagining* home economics. Imagine means forming or conceptualizing a mental *image* of something (Anderson, 2014), which for home economics started more than 125 years ago at the founding conferences in Lake Placid and continues unabated. Reimagine thus means to form a new conception of something by reinterpreting it in a new way or *seeing it in a different light*. This idiom refers to regarding or understanding something in a typically more positive way

(Farlex, n.d.). Through the benefit of shining a light on something that has been sitting in the dark (per se), people can see more and differently than before, which aids in a fresh appraisal (Payer, 2018). Ferretti et al. (2018) described “‘re-imagination’ as a space [to] reflect further and discuss alternatives to current ... frameworks” (p. 732).

Tag Clouds and Memes

In this collective spirit (renew, rethink, remake, reinvent, reimagine) of reinvigorating home economics, this paper develops the idea of creating and spreading positive home economics memes (*HEcMemes*), family and consumer sciences memes (*FCSMemes*) in the United States, that focus on promoting the profession’s longstanding power, relevancy and legitimacy for addressing the complex array of problems facing humanity—painting home economics in a new light.

Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins (1976) conceived the concept of a *meme* to convey the spread of *cultural ideas*. Deagon (2012) briefly referred to home economics memes defining them as “enduring packets of cultural knowledge about Home Economics” (p. 85). She recognized that one of our biggest challenges is to make sure that “derogatory and negative memes fade from our collective cultural knowledge” (p. 86). Just as the profession has endured (Stage & Vincenti, 1997) so have people’s perceptions of it and not always in a positive light (Deagon, 2012).

Actually, Smith’s (2015) use of the tag cloud strategy to analyze the bring back home economics movement inspired this paper about home economics memes. Her work yielded meta data supporting a critique of the movement. Meta data are simply data that describe other data. Memes also reflect meta data—what people think and feel about phenomena. Before Smith (2016), Pendergast (2010, 2013) had pioneered approaching home economics using the tag cloud strategy (see also Deagon & Pendergast, 2019) with this paper continuing from Deagon’s (2012) brief sojourn into exploring home economics memes.

These two approaches to understanding, representing and communicating about home economics are similar but different. Both tag clouds and memes² generate powerful, lingering, easily perpetuated images and perceptions of the profession (positive and negative), but tag clouds draw people deeper into an idea while memes spread ideas. Home economists must be fully aware of their persuasive (sometimes subliminal) influence on the perception of and reception to the profession and what it can offer society and humanity.

Tag Clouds

Briefly, to tag something is to find and identify it. A tag cloud (or word cloud) is a cluster of these tags. The tag cloud strategy involves analyzing text, tagging words therein, counting them and then creating a visual representation of their frequency by using different fonts, colors and text size (pitch). The larger the word appears in the cloud (usually in the center), the more frequently it appeared in the text (McNaught & Lam, 2010; Salonen, 2007), but size does not necessarily indicate the word’s importance, which requires a different analysis (Smith, 2015).

Figure 1 contains a tag cloud for home economists’ thoughts on spiritual health and well-being used with permission from Deagon and Pendergast (2014). Tag clouds represent “a kind of social picture and knowledge sharing ... a type of meta data of the text contained within” (Pendergast, 2013, p. 59). They constitute “a snapshot image of the contents [of documents or websites] thereby attracting others to engage at greater depth if the tag clouds appeal to them” (Pendergast, 2010, p. 293).

Memes

Like tag clouds, memes can be snapshot images with attendant text that attract people to meta ideas spreading throughout a culture. Beyond the Internet and social media platforms, however, other culture-carrying units exist: books, collective experiences, traditions, values, songs, nursery rhymes, dances, clothing (e.g., t shirts and ball caps), movies, habits, practices, theories, philosophies, and day-to-day social interactions and communications (Dawkins, 1976; Karafiath & Brewer, 2013). It is

² *Tag Crowd* is a commonly used tool to create tag clouds: <https://tagcrowd.com/>. Both *Canva.com* (<https://www.canva.com/create/memes/>) and *imgflip.com* (<https://imgflip.com/memegenerator>) can be used to create memes.

this broader notion of a meme that forms the basis of the discussion offered in this paper, meaning its about other culture-carrying units aside from Internet memes.

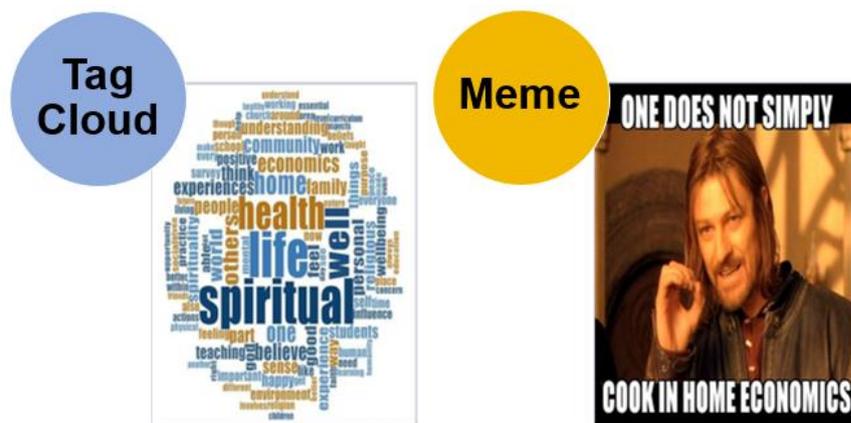


Figure 1 Home Economics Tag Cloud and Meme

That said, Gil (2020b) described an internet meme as “a virally transmitted image embellished with text usually sharing pointed commentary on cultural symbols, social ideas, or current events” (para. 1). Figure 1 contains a home economics meme created by Stuart919 (2014). Y. F. (2020) explained the origins of this particular meme or at least the “one does not just simply...” part of it. As an aside, Cheng and Polataiko (2020) and Orlofsky (2019) addressed the grey area of copyright usage of previously posted memes. Per Cheng and Polataiko (2020), this image is not being used herein for a profit, and the original work has been attributed, meaning its usage runs a low risk of infringement.

If a meme posted to the Internet resonates with people (i.e., strikes an emotional chord), they tend to spread it using social media platforms (e.g., texting, Facebook, Twitter, Instagram), email and even word of mouth. Regardless of how it is propagated, “the more a meme is spread, the greater the cultural influence it has” (Gil, 2020b, para. 1) until it becomes a household name (e.g., Keep Calm, Brexit, Coronavirus, Murder Hornet, climate change) (see Gil, 2020a). Meme topics can cover the gambit of the human experience and range from the mundane to critical life and world events (Ahrenstorff, 2019; Gil, 2020a, b). The topic herein is home economics’ reputation as a profession and discipline.

Memes communicate the underlying feelings, thoughts, opinions and beliefs of the person who created them as well as those who decide to share them (i.e., spread them around) (Ahrenstorff, 2019; Gil, 2020b). Memes are often funny and injected with humour (light and dark, silly and painful). They can also convey political and social commentary (local and world events), shock value, and life lessons. Memes commonly elicit strong emotional reactions: laugh out loud, guffaw, groan, gasp. Some memes appeal to a select few and others are universal (Gil, 2020b).

“Popular memes stick around, ... just because they are so relatable” (Ahrenstorff, 2019, para. 3). Karafiath and Brewer (2013) noted that people can become infected with a meme (i.e., an idea) with (un)desirable effects. For example, “Home economics is just cooking and sewing” is a limiting message about the profession, but it still resonates with (infects) a lot of people. Once infected, people either embrace the meme (idea) and choose to spread it or try to “fight it off” (Karafiath & Brewer, 2013, Slide 5) by denying its existence or changing things so *that* particular meme goes away and is not culturally perpetuated.

If an idea does not resonate (ring true) with someone, they are, in effect, immune to the message and protected from infection. This means they can ignore the meme’s existence and go about their lives. Karafiath and Brewer (2013) used the example of the *ClimateMeme* (global warming) as an idea that had not spread—very few people had become infected at the time. “Whatever messaging worked to infect” (Slide 6) the 5% of humanity that believed in climate change did not work on the rest of the world. Karafiath and Brewer observed that memes that fulfil a psychological need spread quickly while memes heavy with negativity, gloom and conflict spread slowly.

Indeed, for a meme to propagate, it has to be appealing to the masses or, as Ahrenstorff (2019) put it, become fully embedded in the culture and part of the public lexicon. Pendergast (2010) called this a folksonomy—the language of folks—“a people’s taxonomy” of a phenomenon (p. 293). Also, if the entire landscape for a meme is dark (i.e., a gloomy outlook on the message), the meme lacks power to spread (Karafiath & Brewer, 2013). This is exacerbated if there is “a lack of unity in the meme space” (Karafiath & Brewer, 2013, Slide 22). That is, incongruent, conflicting and incompatible messaging can hold back the spread of a meme. Those intrigued with creating and spreading positive home economics memes must craft their message properly, and then stay on message. As evidenced by Brewer’s (2014) blog entry on *Why is global warming such a conversation killer?!!*, staying on message is not an easy task let alone agreeing to the same message.

Meme Uptake Strategy Model Applied to *HEcMemes*

Brewer (2013) and Karafiath and Brewer (2013) created an approach for mapping the uptake and proliferation rate of cultural memes, which McGregor (2014) translated into a meme uptake strategy model (see Figure 2 used and adapted with permission). Once explained, it will be applied herein to discuss the creation and infection of people with positive *HEcMemes*. With this innovation, this paper moves beyond Deagon’s (2012) brief introduction to home economics memes and their role in renewing the profession.

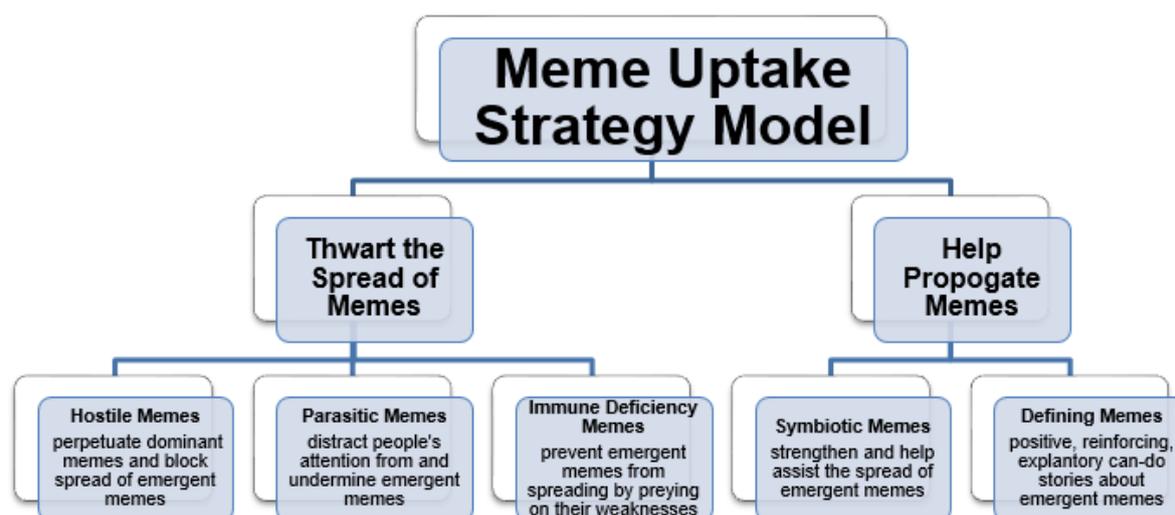


Figure 2 Meme Uptake Strategy Model (adapted with permission from McGregor, 2014)

In short, Brewer (2013) and Karafiath and Brewer (2013) identified a five-dimension strategy for introducing what they called *ClimateMeme2* to replace the *ClimateMeme* that did not spread. First, they maintained that memes that define and explain climate change must be created thereby promoting a can-do spirit—showing people that one has taken the initiative to learn about the issue, knows what one is talking about and is committed to the cause. Second, people must identify and accommodate any immune deficiency memes that prey on any weaknesses of the new message (*ClimateMeme2*) and prevent it from spreading.

Third, hostile memes will be threatened by *ClimateMeme2* (e.g., the oil industry), so they protect themselves by blocking its spread and trying to destroy or discredit it by using conspiracy theories, character attacks or creating self-doubt. These hostile memes must be identified, deconstructed and eliminated. Fourth, Brewer (2013) explained that human attention is food for memes. Parasitic memes eat up the attention of competing memes leaving none left for the new message. They latch onto the old *ClimateMeme* and distract people’s attention from the real issues that the new *ClimateMeme2* is trying to address. Parasites must be identified so their exploitive and distracting power can be made transparent and minimized thus opening a space for *ClimateMeme2* to flourish.

Finally, symbiotic memes (advantageous to both) must be found and propagated, so they can strengthen *ClimateMeme2*, which is “too weak to do so on its own” (Karafiath & Brewer, 2013, Slide 28). Brewer (2013) further explained that symbiotic memes spread just fine on their own and do not interfere with the spread of *ClimateMeme2*. But it can be very beneficial to find symbiotic memes,

because associating with them can increase the vitality and strength of new memes. Conversely, memes exist in complex interconnected webs. Thus, anyone creating new memes must be cognizant of how a symbiotic meme supportive to their cause may actually be harmful if it, itself, is in a mutually supportive relationship with a meme hostile to the new meme. Memes are contextual (J. Brewer, personal communication, November 25, 2020).

This meme uptake strategy model is now applied to home economics to develop an approach for creating and perpetuating affirmative memes about the profession. This does not represent a linear approach but rather an iterative, fortifying approach with a focus on specific meme types when deemed prudent for the cause of advancing positive images of and messaging about home economics. The model addresses both (a) propagation memes and (b) heading-off memes that limit the spread of reimagined, positive messages.

Defining HecMemes

Using Karafiath and Brewer's (2013) suggestion, home economists must reimagine and create new definitions and images of the profession, so that the public can clearly interpret our can-do attitude. This idiom means that people are eager and willing to accept and meet new challenges (Merriam-Webster, n.d.). A can-do profession would thus be marked by its willingness to tackle a problem or task head on and work on it until it is done. Those involved would exude confidence that they are up to the task. Can-do people succeed in exciting people with their messages and activities (STANDS4, n.d.).

Public perception of the home economics profession as open-minded and keen to explain its purpose, mission (now) and vision (future) in contemporary times paves the way for new messages to spread. A can-do attitude acts as a lubricant and catalyst for change and others' receptiveness to this transformation. For example, Deagon's (2012) can-do image is home economics "maturing as a gender-neutral and publically accepted tool for emancipatory change and individual, family and community empowerment" (p. 86).

Immune Deficiency HecMemes

Home economists must identify packets of cultural knowledge that weaken new messages about home economics and prevent them from spreading—called immune deficiency memes. If one is deficient in immunity, one loses resistance. An enduring example of something that could weaken any new messages about home economics is people's past public-school experience (i.e., their junior and senior high school memes). Even home economists themselves have acknowledged unfortunate instances wherein students received exposure to narrow notions of domestic tasks in conjunction with little to no attempt to teach them to think critically about these endeavours (Apple, 1997; Pendergast, 2001).

Instead of just making biscuits, students can be taught the food science (chemistry) of combining various ingredients when baking (cross-curricular connections). Instead of *just* sewing an apron (which *is* important, because it teaches fundamental sewing skills needed for nearly every other sewing project), teachers can teach about the use of child labour to make store-bought clothing. The collective cultural memory of less-than-inspiring home economics classes, with little to no context beyond the immediate task, is a powerful immune deficiency meme that must be recognized, owned and accommodated in new messaging.

To that end, Deagon (2012) urged us to challenge negative public perceptions and "reinforce positive public perceptions" (p. 75) by remessaging "the purpose and effectiveness of Home Economics" (p. 79). As an example, she profiled a collection of people "hooked on home economics" (p. 81), people who attributed their career success and savviness to having benefited from home economics in high school. Deagon (2012) highlighted "online news headlines about high achieving personalities who attribute Home Economics as making an impact on their lives and careers" (p. 83). This positive affirmation is a powerful counterpoint to immune deficiency memes. It both is fact based and has a human face.

Another example of a meme (message) that may weaken messages about home economics is the STEM movement (Science, Technology, Mathematics and Engineering). Some well-meaning people from outside the profession are chiming in. Dinerstein (2018), a medical doctor, claimed that home economics "was cast aside early for a greater emphasis on STEM courses, after all, cooking, shopping,

cleaning are tasks of daily living, we do not reward them financially, and presumably, we learn by osmosis and observation” (para. 4). Rather than recognize it as an established discipline in its own right, he instead said it was time for home economics to be considered a STEM course. Even messages from within the profession were damning. Etheredge et al. (2014) argued that “a STEM-informed FCS curriculum... would gain increased awareness *for* FCS” (p. 9), but only because FCS would be associated with STEM. Likewise, Turgeson (2014) said that FCS should integrate with STEM so FCS can “prove [its] credibility, make [the FCS] curriculum relevant” (p. 9).

McGregor (2019) argued that “an obvious counterpoint is that FCS is *already* credible and relevant. Actually, its roots are in STEM ... and from those roots it became a standalone discipline and profession” (p. 39). Intimating that home economics will gain legitimacy by aligning with STEM actually undermines home economics’ legitimacy. This is yet another example of an insidious immune deficiency meme preying on another meme’s perceived weakness.

Hostile *HEc*Memes

Another challenge home economists face is to discern hostile genes or cultural ideas about home economics that block the spread or propagation of any new messages. *Hostile* is from the Latin *hostilis*, “stranger, enemy” (Harper, n.d.-a). It means antagonistic, aggressive and opposed to (Anderson, 2014). Hostile memes spread through conspiracy theories, character attacks and self-doubt (Brewer, 2013; Karafiath & Brewer, 2013).

Conspiracy theories. When people explain something in way that invokes perceptions of an unlawful, secret plan by a powerful group (often with political overtones), they are creating a conspiracy theory (Goertzel, 1994). Conspire can also mean acting together to bring about an unfortunate result (Anderson, 2014). Some people conspire to thwart home economics with a prime example being educators and policy makers who embrace patriarchy. Although their efforts are not normally unlawful or intentional (blinded by ideology), they can still be interpreted as conspiratorial.

“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 ... As a fundamental principle, the patriarchal ideology guarantees that certain groups are privileged while others are marginalized” (Pendergast & McGregor, 2007, p. 3). Important for home economics is patriarchy’s division of work into paid and unpaid and space into public (market) and private (home). And it always preferable that men have power over some men and over all women (Pendergast & McGregor, 2007).

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—our positive *HEc*Meme.

Character attacks. In a book memetically titled *Stir it Up* (notice the stereotypical meme at play), Elias (2008) maligned the profession by claiming that “home economics no longer exists as a unified movement” (p. 3) (I vehemently beg to differ). A non home economist who taught history at a community college (*not* home economics history but colonialism, women and African American history), damned us to the graveyard. Because her book title also contained the subtitle “home economics in American culture” others were drawn to it and lauded her deep insights (e.g., Emerson, 2009). Stage (1997), herself a woman’s historian, poignantly acknowledged that “home economics has not fared well at the hands of historians. Until recently, women’s historians largely dismissed home economics as little more than a conspiracy to keep women in the kitchen” (p. 1).

The dust jacket on Elias' (2008) book has a 1950s picture of a woman wearing a lab-coat and spoon feeding a blindfolded, seated man. Originally meant to represent avant-garde food product development and testing pioneered by home economists, Elias (2008) chose this image of a woman apparently dominating a man placed in a submissive position to convey her message about home economics. This book (a cultural idea-conveying unit) is definitely an example of a hostile meme toward home economics—a very damning character attack.

To further illustrate its hostility, consider that the founder of home economics, Ellen Swallow Richards, said “it is the economy of the human mind and force that is [sic] most important, and so long as the nurture of these is best accomplished within the four walls of the home, so long will the word *Home* stand first in our title” (as cited in Hunt, 1912, p. 270). Despite this 100-year-old keystone, Elias (2008) claimed that, in the mid-nineties, “most home economics departments had long since changed their names to rid themselves of the word ‘home’” (p. 174). This reason for the name change could not be further from the truth. American home economists at the 1993 Scottsdale, Arizona meeting had opted for the name family and consumer *sciences* (FCS) not because they eschewed home, but because they wanted to convey the message that the profession’s work on behalf of and through home would now embrace *critical science* not just empirical, positivistic science (Vincenti et al., 2004).

Elias (2008) totally diminished this groundswell philosophical forward movement. Not appreciating the significance of the American name change, she falsely claimed that “home economics departments ... have ceased to exist on American campuses” (p. 172). They *do* exist just under the FCS name. Even more damning, she concluded that “the home economist has passed into the mists of collective memory” (p. 173). Tell that to the tens of thousands of home economists who will be reading this article.

The hostile meme went on and on. At page 175, Elias (2008) took comments from home economists themselves out of context to develop her position that home economics is dead, spends too much time navel gazing and is in cahoots with business. She falsely claimed at page 171 that home economics misappropriated the name human ecology from an already existing subfield when in fact Ellen Swallow Richards (founder of home economics) coined the term herself in the early 1900s (Dyball & Carlsson, 2017; McGregor, 2020). Anyone reading Elias' (2008) book, who becomes infected with her hostile meme, can pass it on and on. Hostile memes *must* be identified, deconstructed and eliminated (Karafiath & Brewer, 2013).

Others have attacked the character of the profession by judging it to be on the fringe rather than in the mainstream—a frill subject matter like music, art, drama, physical education, and industrial arts (McGregor, 2019). Using a metaphor, Houston (1980) explained that because the arts are, in fact, infused across the curriculum, they are the surrey itself and not the fringe on top. A surrey was a doorless carriage often with a fringed canopy (roof-like protection). Fringes (e.g., hair bangs, trim on a shawl, tassels) are mistakenly considered decorative rather than functional. Mixing metaphors, Houston added that the arts are “the cake, not the icing” (1980, p. 30). The same sentiment holds for home economics.

Being on the fringe is being on the margin. Being on the margin means being readily ignored and lacking a voice and influence (Pendergast, 2001). If something is on the fringe, it is still part of something but at the farthest point from the center (Pearson, n.d.). Being on the outer edge, it does not completely belong nor is it fully accepted by the main group. Often, it can only gain admittance to the center upon agreement to exemplary (inordinately high standards) and conformist behaviour. Regarding home economics specifically, Pendergast (2001) admonished us to no longer cringe on the margins. She provocatively proclaimed that we get a warped sense of camaraderie from fighting battles to save the profession, but we go about it the wrong way.

With that insight, she urged members of the profession to dismantle the familiar (which holds us back) and learn how to ride the waves of change by being expert novices (i.e., very good at dealing with uncertainty and risks while continually learning anew) (Pendergast, 2001). “Home economists can, *should*, engage in risky activities that mock officialdom, refuse [imposed] order, refuse normalization and refuse to be tidied and kept in place” (McGregor, 2003, p. 177).

Self-doubt. Members of the profession have to stave off self-doubt and practice from a position of conviction. Doubt is a feeling of uncertainty—not completely confident and sure (Anderson, 2014).

Self-doubt is uncertainty about one's competence in important abilities. Research shows that feelings of self-doubt may pose a threat to self-esteem (i.e., one's evaluation of and respect for oneself) (Hermann et al., 2002). This correlation has implications, because home economists who doubt themselves may have low self-esteem leading to less chance of sustaining activities pursuant to defining, explaining, justifying and legitimizing home economics through new culture-carrying units (memes).

From within, home economists' self-doubt, some say reflected in ubiquitous name changes, is very damaging to the spread of new home economics messages. As a respectfully tendered example, Marjorie East, a prominent and influential American home economist, described herself as having spent her life trying to "bring order into the field and a sense of intellectual responsibility," but she was "dismayed by my failure to make a profound difference in the field. Many other ways I might have shaped the field occur to me now. Could, should, ought, are words that haunt old age" (East, 1997, pp. 120-121).

This self-derogatory statement, delegitimizing her own work, is too common in our rhetoric. East was 81 when she made those comments; she passed away in 2015 at the age of 97 (Burpee, Carpenter, & Hutchins Funeral Home, 2015). In affirmation of her influence, Marjorie's obituary focused almost solely on her leadership within, visions of and contributions to home economics (Burpee, Carpenter, & Hutchins Funeral Home, 2015). Such was the impact she had. Her work is considered seminal (i.e., strongly influencing later developments); I just cited her last week. Home economists' self-doubt can become a hostile meme in its own right, and others can exploit that weakness.

Parasitic HEcMemes

By analogy with biological parasites, parasites live on or in a host organism feeding off it at the latter's expense. The intestinal tapeworm is a common human parasite. The worm grows while the human host weakens and sometimes dies. Getting rid of the parasite entails either starving it by making the food source less palatable or digestible or paralyzing it and flushing it out (Boudry & Hofhuis, 2018). Parasitic memes "undermine the interests of their hosts [because they are] 'selfish' forms of culture that are designed to further their own propagation, even at the expense of their hosts" (Boudry & Hofhuis, 2018, p. 156).

One such parasitic meme that feeds off home economics and undermines its interests, despite its best intentions, is *bring back home economics*. Those perpetuating it, medical doctors and health agencies, are struggling with educating patients about foods and nutrition. Health care systems (policy makers) are struggling with the costs of obesity. It is in *their* best interest to selfishly ask for home economics to be brought back, but home economics suffers (weakens), because a very narrow stereotype is perpetuated—one that damned us beginning in the sixties and seventies (Stage & Vincenti, 1997).

If home economics remains infected with this parasite, it will not thrive, and both interests will be compromised. Smith's (2016) critical discourse analysis of the movement was her attempt to paralyze the parasitic meme and flush it out. This purge matters, because a pervasive and persistent strain of negative home economics beliefs that benefit someone else can wreak havoc on the profession's reputation and viability (per Boudry & Hofhuis, 2018).

Symbiotic HEcMemes

Symbiotic is Greek *symbiosis*, "live together" (Harper, n.d.-c). As the profession creates and propagates new home economics memes (messages), it will benefit from finding and aligning itself with memes that serve both interests thereby strengthening messages about home economics or at least not interfering with their spread. Unlike parasitic relationships, symbiotic relationships are beneficial, advantaging everyone. Any messages pursuant to the well-being and wellness of individuals, families and community would constitute symbiotic memes. So too would those advocating for the consumer interest, adequate shelter, food security, child and human development, nutrition and wellness, dignified aging and other perennial problems that every human generation encounters over its life span.

The caveat is that any symbiotic meme must not align too closely with ideologies conducive to privileging the market, profit, economic growth, technological progress, militarism, violence and such. This would be hostile to the home economics message negating any symbiotic relationship. For

example, it would be unwise to align a positive home economics message about how it fosters the consumer interest with a likeminded, politically active consumer advocacy group that is partially funded by a military-industrial complex corporation. The latter sell consumer goods and deliver services *but* also make and sell military weapons for the state and reek of partisanship. Although the (symbiotic) consumer advocacy group is *not* in the weapon-making business, its relationship with a corporation that *is* could taint any home economics message by association.

Discussion and Conclusions

Per Karafiath and Brewer's (2013) meme uptake strategy model (see Figure 2), if home economists can deal with immune-deficiency, parasitic and hostile memes, while developing clear communications about defining and symbiotic memes, the spread of positive *HEcMemes* is more assured. Said another way, inspired by the can-do spirit (the defining memes), *HEcMeme* advocates can persevere in their attempts to infect people with the home economics imperative via new messages and judicious connections to symbiotic memes.

Advocates for *HEcMemes* must remember that memes are attracted to or repelled by minds at different levels of readiness for the cultural idea (Lucas as cited in McGregor, 2014). Given the inadequate reception and respect that the profession receives these days, due in part to the damaging memes thwarting our reception, it will be challenging to break through any cultural transmission barriers with a reimagined profession (or ... choose an re-word: renewed, rethought, remade, reinvented). Whatever messages we *do* create must be truly relatable, appeal to a psychological need and be positive in nature (not dark, gloomy or negative) (Ahrenstorff, 2019; Karafiath & Brewer, 2013). Once infected, people will hopefully be more inclined to purposefully place the *HEcMeme* in their personal mind space and spread it (Lucas as cited in McGregor, 2014).

Fortunately for us, memes go through variations, mutations, competition, and inheritance each of which influences its generative potential (i.e., capability of reproducing and spreading). Once positive *HEcMemes* come into existence, begin to spread and become part of the cultural DNA, they can self-replicate, mutate and respond to people's acceptance or resistance to their existence (Kelly, 1994). By consistently employing the meme uptake strategy model (Figure 2), home economics can ensure that *HEcMemes* morph into something that deeply resonates with the global cultural psyche of people concerned with addressing perennial problems on behalf of humankind through the home economics imperative.

Coming full circle to the *bring back home economics* parasitic meme that prompted this discussion in the first place, Deagon (2012) introduced the idea of participatory journalism as a way to counter mainstream journalism's distracting messages (including books like Elias, 2008). Deagon (2012) charged *participants* in the home economics profession with finding their own can-do home economics stories and being "aware of the need to mitigate the effects of undesirable news reports and quality control of information" (p. 84). She advised home economists to find and promote messages and stories (e.g., *HEcMemes*) that (a) convey our service to humanity, (b) reinforce our commitment to stewardship and care of community and environments, and (c) focus on larger realities by transcending beyond just individuals and families to all of humanity and the Earth.

Per Figure 3, home economics is so much more than meets the eye—there is more to it than what there appears to be at first glance. Knowing this in our collective hearts, we can create and use memes to our advantage (e.g., media articles, Internet memes, books, policy work, think tanks and other culture-carrying units). Ensuring that our messages resonate with people (ring true) opens doors to a more intense dialogue about what the profession brings to humanity and the future. Gabriel (2020) provided a brilliant example in her response to a Philippine senator's suggestion that home economics be temporarily removed from the curriculum during the COVID-19 global pandemic to make room for science, math and reading. She concluded that "HE offers skills for life. This short statement alone says so much about its profound importance in education" (para. 8). Similarly, in its recently launched *#FCSsuccess* campaign, the American Association of Family and Consumer Sciences (AAFCS) (2020) identified home economists as "the best messengers to help us tell our story [and] shed greater light on the value of what we do" (paras. 4, 5).



Figure 3 Home Economics Meme

To wrap up, home economists have to first get people's attention with our messaging and can-do attitude and then work to engage them in deep discourse with our mission (now) and vision (future) (AAFCS, 2020). That conversation would be focused on reiterating what we already do that works for the good of humanity and informed by re-words pertaining to the creation and reconceptualization of home economics in a new and forward-looking light. To reimagine home economics and keep it invigorating, we must create a reflective space where we can explore alternative futures and strategize about how to communicate them to the public with *HEcMemes* (FCSMemes) one tool to jumpstart and facilitate this process.

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