

Practice

# Universal Connectedness, Human Consciousness, and Noetic Sciences: Potential FCS and Home Economics Trajectory

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This opinion piece makes the case for family and consumer sciences (FCS) and home economics to bring noetic sciences and noetic experiences into their repertoire and broaden their minds about (a) human consciousness; (b) subjective, intuitive inner knowing; and (c) universal connectedness. Engaging with noetic sciences is not as anathema as it once was. Respecting noetic experiences' influence on people's lives could become a viable trajectory of vanguard FCS and home economics' philosophical and theoretical musings with the potential to augment research, education, and practice

I am convinced that family and consumer sciences (FCS) and home economics should be on the vanguard — a group of people leading the way to new ideas and developments. Grounded in that conviction, I prepared this short missive (an opinion piece) on noetic sciences and noetic experiences, which I first encountered when reading Dan Brown's (2009) novel *The Lost Symbol*. As a caveat, opinion pieces contain an author's personal statement (well-reasoned argument) about a topic in anticipation of others' consideration (McLean, 2011).

Astronaut Dr. Edgar Mitchell (sixth person to walk on the moon) coined the term *noetic sciences* more than 50 years ago (in 1973). During his return to Earth from the 1971 Apollo 14 mission, he "experienced a profound sense of universal connectedness . . . We are not only in the universe but the universe is in us. I hadn't had that experience before. It was an epiphany" (Mitchell quoted in Nicklin, 2023, last para.). Nearly 25 years later, while still processing this moment of great insight, he wrote a book, wherein he tried to reconcile science and theology to understand human consciousness and universal connectedness (Mitchell & Williams, 1996).

Shortly after the Apollo mission, Mitchell founded the Institute of Noetic Sciences (IONS) in 1973, so that researchers could "integrate scientific methodology with inner knowing" (Nicklin, 2023, para. 3). People needed a science that could "explain the unexplainable" (IONS, 2024, p. para. 4). Noetic sciences are considered one of many frameworks that people can use to engage with reality. In particular, noetic sciences strive to push past the long-entrenched scientific, mechanistic, and materialistic framework and bridge it with spiritual interpretations of reality

in concert with direct experiences (IONS, 2024; Mitchell & Williams, 1996).

IONS (2024) explained that "no•et•ic is Greek *noesis/noetikos*, meaning inner wisdom, direct knowing, intuition, or implicit understanding" (para. 1). Science is defined as "systems of acquiring knowledge that use observation, experimentation, and replication to describe and explain natural phenomena" (para. 7). Husserl (2001) similarly distinguished between noetic and logical conditions for science. Noetic sciences (conditions) concern the subjective act of knowing, while logical conditions concern the objective that can be studied independently of the subjective (the noetic).

Noetic sciences combine the two. It is "a multidisciplinary field of study that brings objective scientific tools and techniques together with subjective inner knowing to study the nature of reality" (IONS, 2024, p. para. 12). Its practice is based on the notion of consciousness (to be discussed) especially how human consciousness is more than a product of the brain; it is part of the fabric of the universe (Mitchell & Williams, 1996; Nicklin, 2023). IONS (2024) envisioned a nexus of outer investigation (science) and inner knowing (noetics) where people can "discover entirely new ways of being and of doing that uplift humanity and advance thriving for all" (para. 11). "A nexus is more than an intersection. It is an important connection between a series of elements comprising a system of thought. Its role is to bind things together in a chain of causation" (Gibbs & McGregor, 2023, p. 1).

The notion of a science that uplifts humanity should resonate with FCS and home economics, which is ideally (i.e., what one hopes to attain) a profession and discipline "focused on the home in order to improve humanity" (East,

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1979, p. 141). Home economists might be interested to know that noetic sciences strive to enhance (a) humanity's promise and potential, (b) people's well-being and their quality of life, (c) their transformation and (d) their human experiences by valuing *noetic experiences* that amount to more than mere coincidence (i.e., an occurrence of events with no apparent causal connection).

Examples of noetic experiences include unexplainable encounters (e.g., extraterrestrial life), insights that come in a dream, hunches or intuitions that come out of nowhere, gut feelings without rational support that cannot be explained, thinking of someone who subsequently reaches out or shows up, and premonitions that something is going to happen (IONS, 2024; Vleten, 2011). Except for an alien encounter, I have experienced all these paranormal noetic experiences (i.e., supposedly beyond the scope of normal scientific understanding). I am not alone in this as noetic experiences are prevalent worldwide and have gained the attention of normal science (Kuhn, 2024; Wahbeh & Kriegsman, 2023).

Consider that some modern-day quantum physicists and philosophers refer to some of these experiences as *the imaginal* — thinking without words — that lead to sudden enlightenment or illumination (Corbin, 1964; Gibbs & McGregor, 2023; Nicolescu, 2014). Corbin (1964, 1979) coined the term *mundus imaginal* to capture the separate world that people experience internally. *Mundus* is Latin, 'universe, world' (Harper, 2024). In effect, *mundus imaginal* names people's inner experiences inside their mind (own world) that lead to unexpected, often unexplainable, insights into reality. Noetic sciences call this "subjective inner knowing" (IONS, 2024, p. para. 7) or "intuitive inner knowing" (Wahbeh & Kriegsman, 2023, p. 5).

In more detail, *mundus imaginalis* is an "intermediate world whose ontological level is above the world of the senses and below the pure intelligible world; it is more immaterial than the former and less immaterial than the latter" (Corbin, 1964, p. 6). Noetic scientists are convinced that "there may be some ontological reality to subjective experiences of interconnectedness" (Vleten, 2011, para. 19; see also Kuhn, 2024). For that reason, noetic scientists consider noetic experiences, which are ubiquitous worldwide, very real (Wahbeh & Kriegsman, 2023). They have their own ontology (i.e., they exist; are a form of being) and metaphysics (i.e., a set of operating rules). These experiences influence people's behavior, health, and life choices (IONS, 2024; Vleten, 2011).

Noetic scientists posit that just because normal science cannot explain noetic experiences, does not make them insignificant. On the contrary, these nonphysical phenomena are orienting life events that merit critical inquiry and intellectual investigation (IONS, 2024). They are "illuminations, revelations, full of significance and importance" (James, 1902/2015, p. 533). Nonetheless, "noetic science often finds itself at the intersection of support and skepticism" (Nicklin, 2023, p. para. 6). Skeptics vigorously assert that noetic sciences are concerned with topics that are taboo to academia and respectable professions — the paranormal (Novella, 2023).

The paranormal includes but is not limited to telepathy; psychic abilities; extrasensory perception (ESP, sixth sense); knowing the future (precognition); death-related experiences; and the possibility of extraterrestrial life (IONS, 2024; Novella, 2023; Wahbeh & Kriegsman, 2023). Not to be sidetracked by the tabooic nature of noetic sciences' bailiwick, its most significant contribution is its interest in human *consciousness*. Other sciences are also intrigued with human consciousness (Kuhn, 2024) including quantum physics (Nicolescu, 2014). Noetic sciences are interested in paranormal phenomena because they reflect consciousness as well as invisible but very real and influential interconnections — harken astronaut Mitchell's universal connection.

The Institute for Noetic Sciences' mission is thus to "advance the science of consciousness and human experience to serve individual and collective transformation." Therefore, our research focuses on the fundamental nature of consciousness, its interaction with the physical world, and how the human experience of consciousness can dramatically transform" (Vleten, 2011, para. 13). The intent is to conduct basic science and laboratory research on and advance the study of human consciousness to gain a more complete understanding of its nature and thus enhance quality of life and achieve human potential (Vleten, 2011).

Noetic sciences assume that human consciousness has four characteristics (Popova, 2018). (a) Consciousness is ineffable. It is so profound that people cannot adequately express it in words; instead, consciousness must be directly experienced. (b) It also has a noetic quality in that it is both a state of feeling and a state of knowledge (insight into depths of truth). (c) Consciousness is transient, meaning it cannot be sustained for long. When gone, people have a hard time reproducing it. Yet memory of it lingers as does the sense of importance to one's life. (d) People passively experience the oncoming of consciousness; their will is temporarily in abeyance. A feeling overcomes them or comes over them (James, 1902/2015).

Although people tend to agree that a widely accepted scientific explanation for the origins of noetic consciousness is lacking, there is growing evidence that consciousness is important. For noetic scientists, consciousness truly matters whether at the individual, collective, or universal level. Respectively, it can be (a) individual awareness affecting perceptions, interpretations, and intentions; (b) how a group makes sense and meaning of the world; and (c) "the shared ground of being from which all experiences and phenomena arise and eventually return . . . a 'milieu of [human] potential'" (Vleten, 2011, para. 10).

I suggest that FCS and home economics practitioners have an opportunity to broaden their perspective on what constitutes science. Nearly 50 years ago, Brown and Paolucci (1979) guided the profession along a similar trajectory with their notion of three metascientific perspectives to conceptualize the theory and practice aspects of home economics: analytical/empirical science, interpretive science, and critical science. It is not such a stretch to embrace the idea of noetic sciences: human consciousness, interconnectedness, spirituality balanced with science, and a

respect for many ways of knowing including wisdom, intuition, and the Sacred (IONS, 2024).

Without using the term noetic sciences, theoretical quantum physicist Nicolescu (2014) espoused the same message in his transdisciplinary methodology, which has been introduced to FCS and home economics practitioners (M. M. Brown, 1993; McGregor, 2011b). Furthermore, the profession has long been interested in global education, a global perspective, consumer citizenship, and education for sustainable development (IFHE, 2008; McGregor, 2002; Williams et al., 1990). By association, they have inherently embraced key aspects of noetic sciences if not for the same reason: universal interconnectedness, human consciousness, spirituality, many ways of knowing, and an appreciation for the unknown and unknowable. This might predispose some practitioners to noetic sciences.

Whether scientifically proven or not, noetic experiences and ways of knowing can deeply affect people (Vleten, 2011). In a personal example, I once struggled with understanding and making sense of Bubolz and Sontag's (1988, 1993) conceptualization of home economics as human ecology. One morning just before I woke up, I experienced a liminal (waking threshold) moment when it all coalesced — thinking without words (Corbin, 1969). My consciousness had the epiphany of a spider plant metaphor (noetic experience), which I subsequently published (McGregor, 2011a).

Nicolescu (2014) acknowledged the significance of "the very short intermediate period between sleep and waking up . . . the sudden and immediate appearance of a solution at the very moment of awakening" (p. 180). After a long period of preparation, revelations (i.e., noetic experiences) manifest "without the slightest participation of ordinary logical thinking" (p. 180), but previous "logic effort paves the way for the information to pop up" (p. 179). I now wonder if my paper would have been published, if I had presented it as a noetic experience. Because of the taboo nature of noetic sciences (i.e., to study these phenomena is to cross the academic, rational line), they have detractors and skeptics (Nicklin, 2023; Novella, 2023).

Novella (2023) characterized noetic sciences as pseudoscience, which is a collection of theories, assumptions, methods, beliefs, assertions, explanations, or practices that are presented as scientific but are not compatible with the scientific method (Bell, 2012). For Novella, pseudoscience is "performing research to show that the phenomenon is true, or perhaps how it works, but not doing research capable of determine [sic] if it is true" (para. 4). In effect, he criticized noetic sciences for assuming that particular phenomena are real, when it has not been scientifically established. He also described noetic sciences as fringe science. Unlike pseudoscience, which is incorrectly framed as science, ideas on the fringe of science are considered rational but not likely to produce good results due to contradictory or incomplete evidence (Dutch, 1982; Friedlander, 2018).

## Conclusion

Skirting the pseudoscience/fringe science rabbit hole, I invite FCS and home economics practitioners to critically reflect on noetic sciences, which explicitly challenge deeply

entrenched normal science and call for their integration, so a more balanced explanation of reality is available. The profession has already been taken to task for uncritically embracing the scientific paradigm to the exclusion of other sciences (M. M. Brown, 1993; M. M. Brown & Paolucci, 1979). We could acknowledge the potential of valuing a science that concerns the power of wisdom, intuition, aha moments, liminal threshold crossings, unexplainable phenomena, and so on. Although lacking logical rationale, many people consider these noetic experiences significant, important, and worthy of critical intellectual and scientific inquiry (James, 1902/2015; Kuhn, 2024; Vleten, 2011; Wahbeh et al., 2021; Wahbeh & Kriegsman, 2023). FCS and home economics practitioners could consider joining their ranks.

Noetic scientists maintain that noetic experiences (with their anchor in human consciousness) have their own ontology (unique existence) and metaphysics (their own set of operating rules) (Vleten, 2011). "Ontology and metaphysics have gained some new energy lately, thanks to the mystifying implications of quantum physics and the science of consciousness, which are turning many scientists into philosophers, and vice-versa" (Ontology, n.d., Controversies section). But "strong cultural taboos exist about sharing [noetic] experiences. Thus, many may not feel comfortable transparently discussing or researching these topics, despite growing evidence that these experiences may be real" (Wahbeh et al., 2021, p. 1).

"As long as the [noetic experience] remains an outcast from the halls of science and scholarship, the taboo will persist" (Radin, 2009, p. 27). That said, although skeptics consider noetic sciences' foci taboo (Novella, 2023), its interest in human consciousness is not taboo. In fact, Kuhn (2024, p. 156) very recently acknowledged the "greater interest in consciousness among scientists [and claimed that this interest is] no longer [a] risky . . . scientific endeavour."

To affirm this assertion, he mapped the research landscape of consciousness with the intent of "distinguish[ing] what consciousness is ontologically from how consciousness happens operationally" (Kuhn, 2024, p. 5). His taxonomy contained 209 consciousness-related theories (loosely used description) organized into 10 categories or types. Noetic experiences are acknowledged in his taxonomy, although IONS is not. He said that his "Landscape of Consciousness is a work-in-process — permanently" (Kuhn, 2024, p. 156). This sentiment intimates broad, established comfort with scientific research around human consciousness.

FCS and home economics practitioners are encouraged to consider these concluding thoughts. Engaging with noetic sciences is not as anathema as it once was (Kuhn, 2024). Indeed, noetic experiences are ubiquitous worldwide and considered very real (i.e., their own unique ontology and metaphysics). Bringing noetic sciences into our professional and disciplinary repertoire could broaden our minds about human consciousness; subjective, intuitive inner knowing; and universal connectedness. Respecting their influence on people's lives could become a viable trajectory of vanguard FCS and home economics' philosophical and the-

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