

Life Adjustment, Women's Science, and Training for Low-Paid Jobs: Goals of Home Economics Education in Secondary Schools from 1950 to 1972

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Introduction: Radical Feminist Criticism and Dilemmas of Home Economics

The disparity between home economists' own understanding of what they stood for and their public image as champions of domesticity was often a sore point for those inside the profession. Home economists were shocked when Robin Morgan, "a radical feminist" challenged the existence of home economics itself at the American Home Economics Association (AHEA) Convention in 1972, blaming home economics for strengthening the three areas — "the institution of marriage, the institution of the nuclear family, and the incredible manipulation of women as consumers" — that the radical women's movement was trying to destroy. Morgan was attacking home economics in general but targeting high school home economics education in particular. If home economists were not ready to "quit [their] jobs," she contended, they could "actively lobby and demand that home economics for junior and senior high school women not be required courses" or make home economics required for both high school boys and girls.¹ Morgan's declaration came upon the AHEA members with a "great shock," prompting them to organize the Women's Role Committee and discuss developments of home economics education and the new directions it would need to take. In its first meeting, the AHEA president Marjorie East urged her colleagues to reflect on whether there was any truth to Morgan's claims. Doris E. Hanson, the executive director of the AHEA conceded, "When we tried to respond to Robin Morgan, to tell her what we do and what we actually stand for, we didn't have it together."²

This paper will revisit the developments of home economics from the 1950s to 1972 that radical feminists would also see or may have failed to discern, and reconsider whether and why home economics education for high school girls had to be blamed. During the two decade preceding Morgan's declaration, home economics teachers had already begun their effort to prove the legitimacy of their presence in secondary school curricula by being responsive to societal changes and shifts in the pedagogical trend and restating their goals accordingly. Despite harsh criticism from different corners of the society, home economics did not disappear, but needed to do much "rethinking" in search of an amicable settlement with its opponents, and this process continued into the twentieth-first century.³ Since the 1960s, home economists have always been acting on the defensive. By examining how they survived this turbulent period, this study will provide an account of a traditionally female field, never accorded much academic prestige, undergoing and coping with further devaluation, and discuss the implications of their choices for the school population and society.

Not only for Robin Morgan, but for some attendees of the Women's Role Committee meeting, high school home economics teachers deserved admonishment. President Marjorie East

¹ "What Robin Morgan Said at Denver," *Journal of Home Economics* 65.1 (1973): 13.

² "The Women's Role Committee Speak Out," *Journal of Home Economics* 65. 1 (1973): 10.

³ For the path home economics has taken since the 1960s to the end of the century, see Virginia B. Vincenti, "Home Economics Moves into the Twentieth-First Century," in *Rethinking Home Economics: Women and the History of Profession*, ed. Sarah Stage and Virginia B. Vincenti (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 1997), pp. 301-20.

herself charged that “many high school teachers really *don't* do anything much except stitch and stir.” Rather than emphasizing practical homemaking skills of cooking and sewing, they needed to adopt a “*comprehensive* approach” including “child development, consumer education, decision making, nutrition, and financial management.”⁴ The home economists were neither ready to “quit their jobs” nor to lobby for the removal of home economics from required courses in high schools. They were, however, willing to proceed with the third direction suggested by Morgan: getting boys involved. While they recognized major obstacles to attracting males as students and teachers to their field, such as a lack of relevance of home economics textbooks to men’s lives and the “male mystique,” the home economists at the meeting tried to spotlight successful cases of boys’ involvement. By pursuing this path, their educational programs could benefit both boys and girls, and ultimately their profession would lead men and women to exchange their traditional roles and adopt “alternate lifestyles.”⁵

The home economists and college home economics educators attending the first meeting thus seem to have agreed that home economics, in order to survive, should shed the reputation of home economics as a subject teaching girls homemaking skills. They referred to Ellen Richards as their historical model,⁶ and they projected their profession as a domain of women in sciences that had been leading women’s advancement in professionalism.⁷ Now that both an all-female field on the one hand and the pedagogical ideal of “progressive education” that had legitimized homemaking instruction for all secondary school pupils on the other had become out of date, the home economists were attempting to redefine home economics as a subject teaching theory as well as practice of homemaking to both boys and girls.⁸ Probably due to their interest in promoting the image of home economics as an academically serious subject for both sexes, the meeting did not take up the long-existing debate over home economics as vocational education in secondary schools. The disagreements about vocational emphasis of home economics can be traced back to the time when it was first introduced on a large scale to American high schools in the early twentieth century as “the female equivalent of industrial education for males.”⁹ This definition of home economics succeeded in securing its legitimate position in secondary school curricula and its inclusion in the Smith-Hughes Act that provided federal support to vocational subjects, but its implication was not that simple. What vocational training was appropriate for girls? Was it to prepare all of them for unpaid labor as homemakers, or some segments of them for paid work

⁴ Ibid., pp. 11-12, p. 15.

⁵ Ibid., pp. 11-12, p. 14

⁶ Ellen Richards served as the major engine of the home economics movement at the turn of the twentieth century that led to the establishment of the profession of home economics as a field providing opportunities for women trained in sciences, and to the founding of the AHEA as its national professional organization. For more on Ellen Richards’ pivotal role in the early development of home economics and her sense of mission in society, see Sarah Stage, “Ellen Richards and the Social Significance of the Home Economics Movement,” in *Rethinking Home Economics*, pp. 17-33.

⁷ “Women’s Role Committee Speak Out,” pp. 14-15.

⁸ In higher education, home economists had long struggled to define their field as a pure science. In the 1950s and 1960s, home economics did elevate their academic prestige when the all-female domain was disintegrated by the intervention and invasion by the male administration and faculty. For more on college home economists’ fate in the 1950s and 1960s, see Maresi Nerad, “Gendered Stratification in Higher Education: The Department of Home Economics at the University of California, Berkeley 1916-1962,” *Women’s Studies International Forum* 10.2 (1987): 157-164; Margaret Rossiter, “The Men Move In: Home Economics, 1950-1970,” *Rethinking Home Economics*, pp. 96-117

⁹ John L. Rury, “Vocationalism for Home and Work: Women’s Education in the United States 1880-1930,” *The Social History of American Education*, B. Edward McClellan and William J. Reese, ed. (Urbana and Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1988), p.236.

requiring home economics-related skills? What is more, any kind of vocational emphasis of home economics could undermine a sense of mission embraced by the earlier proponents of home economics education. Had it not been conceived as a liberal art and science education tailored for young women? The initial dilemmas embedded in home economics from the very beginning rose to the surface, as shifts in educational philosophy from the late 1950s and the rise of feminism in the 1960s questioned the legitimacy of home economics in secondary school curricula.¹⁰ Home economics education could be designed to be feminine or coeducational, science-oriented or skill-directed, and general or occupational, although understandably home economists would not be willing to emphasize each aspect equally. Home economics could therefore be “flexible”¹¹ in defining itself. However, as this paper will show, the flexibility did not guarantee the stability of its position in the secondary school curriculum. Even among the core group of the profession, there was no unanimous understanding of what they stood for. This would make them susceptible to attacks from the outside.

The impact of “What Robin Morgan Said” in 1972 in the presence of the nation’s leading home economists lingered. Women’s historians as well as home economists have responded to Morgan from different standpoints. Some discuss home economics from the perspective of what home economists told rank-and-file housewives and working-class immigrant women to do, and examine professional advice given by the former to the latter.¹² For Sarah Stage, a women’s historian, they represent the older scholarship of home economics that accept Morgan’s view of home economics, due in part to their failure to acknowledge the development from the nineteenth century education of domesticity to the turn of the twentieth century formation of home economic as a gendered profession.¹³ Although my reading of some of the previous works critically reviewed by Stage finds that they do recognize this shift in home economics, I share her interest in “rethinking” the feminist critique of home economics education.

This paper attempts to interpret the development of home economics in secondary education for the two decades before 1972 as a contested gendered domain fraught with inner dilemmas, paradoxes, and contradictions. In discussing the processes by which home economists tried to modify and redefine their goals in secondary education in order to protect their field, I will pay attention to what Diane Ravitch calls the “periodic swings of the educational pendulum,”¹⁴ the swings in public educational policy influenced by social climate in the 1950s and 1960s. My focus is therefore on philosophical developments of secondary school home economics education for about twenty years leading to 1972. This study draws on professional journals of secondary education published mainly in California, the *California Journal of Home Economics* (in 1963 the journal adopted the new title, *Journal of Secondary Education*), the official journal of the AHEA, and other official and quasi-official published materials concerning public education policies. Reports by home economics teachers in secondary schools give some glimpses of what was going

¹⁰ For the earlier development of home economic education in secondary schools as a vocational subject, see Rima D. Apple, “Liberal Arts or Vocational Training?,” *Rethinking Home Economics*, pp. 79-95; Rury, pp. 233-41.

¹¹ Stage, “Introduction: Home Economics: What’s in a Name?,” in *Rethinking Home Economics*, p.10.

¹² For example, see Barbara Ehrenreich and Deidre English, *For Her Own Good: Two Centuries of the Experts’ Advice to Women* (New York: Anchor Book, 2005); Susan Strasser, *Never Done: a History of American Housework* (New York, Henry Holt and Company, 1982).

¹³ Stage, “Introduction,” pp.1-2.

¹⁴ Diane Ravitch, *The Schools We Deserve: Reflections on the Educational Crises of Our Time* (New York: Basic Books, Inc., Publishers, 1985), p. 5.

on in actual classrooms, but it should be assumed that they only represented the voices of leading teachers who were willing to experiment with new theories and methods. By analyzing the professional discourse, I will illuminate ominous signs in terms of the survival of home economics in secondary schools that had already surfaced by the beginning of the 1970s. The vulnerability of home economics was indicated in the weak explanations given by home economists for the legitimacy and necessity of secondary school home economics. I argue that although challenges from the viewpoint of women liberation were powerful, the *raison d'être* of home economics in secondary education had already been undermined by the time that radical feminism upset the profession.

1. Homemaking Education in the Heyday of “Life Adjustment Education:” Preparing All Young People for Happy Home Lives

In the mid-1950s there was a broad consensus that the primary goal of home economics programs at the secondary school level was to teach young people how to establish happy homes. In the 1950s, the term “home economics” was only used to describe courses offered at the junior and senior college levels while “homemaking education” was used in junior and senior high schools, and in adult education. In Pasadena, California, homemaking education in secondary schools and home economics in higher education were distinguished as follows: the objective of the former was to teach pupils “skills, attitudes, and understandings related to the problems of establishing and maintaining a home,” whereas the latter aimed at “the education of students for professions such as teaching, dietetics, institutional management, research, and home economics in business.”¹⁵

School administrators and homemaking teachers in the mid-1950s agreed that homemaking courses in secondary schools, which were designed to prepare pupils for home lives, should reach all of girls and boys since they figured that everyone could benefit from such training. This emphasis on the needs of all children reflected the principles of progressive education that was still the powerful pedagogical philosophy in the mid-1950s. Diane Ravitch states that it was when advocates of progressive education gained dominance at teachers’ colleges and professional educators’ associations in the 1930s that the struggles between them and “traditionalists” were suspended.¹⁶ The educational transformation in this direction was accelerated in the 1930s partly due to the expansion of the school population.¹⁷ More and more children who were not academically oriented were attending secondary school. To respond to the new situation, progressives argued, the curriculum should be adjusted to the needs of all children. The “old-fashioned, subject-centered, rigid, authoritarian” and “traditional” school needed to be supplanted by the “modern, child-centered, flexible, democratic” and “progressive” one.¹⁸ By the end of World War II, according to Lawrence Cremin, progressive education had become the “conventional wisdom.”¹⁹ During the decade after the war, the schools that emphasized the

¹⁵ Mary O. Fleming, “Report of One School System in Action” in “Symposium: The Changing American Family: Implications for Secondary Schools,” *California Journal of Secondary Education* 31.4 (1956): 243.

¹⁶ Ravitch, p. 45.

¹⁷ In the academic year 1929-30, secondary enrollments were 4,800,000. A decade later, it rose to 7,100,000. Lawrence A. Cremin, *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education 1876-1957* (New York: Vintage Books, 1964), p. 274.

¹⁸ Ravitch, p. 81.

¹⁹ Cremin borrows the words, “conventional wisdom” from John Kenneth Galbraith. Cremin, p. 328.

theory and practice of progressive education, especially those of “life adjustment education” that gained nationwide publicity in the late 1940s, shared the mainstream view of professional journals, textbooks, school boards, and the U.S. Office of Education.²⁰ Its goal was, to quote the Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth established in 1947, “to equip all American youth to live democratically with satisfaction to themselves and profit to society as home members, workers, and citizens.”²¹ The goal of homemaking education in the mid-1950s, which was to prepare all youth for proper home and family living, perfectly fitted the principles of life adjustment education.²²

In the mid-1950s, a call for family life education for all pupils was made among educators who took recent transformations in the American family seriously. They emphasized that all American young people needed to be given an opportunity to learn how to become responsible and useful family members as sons and daughters and how to establish their own homes in the future. A symposium on inclusion of family life education in the secondary school curriculum appeared in the *California Journal of Secondary Education* in 1956.²³

In its lead article, Ernest W. Burgess, Professor Emeritus of Sociology at the University of Chicago and a “pioneer”²⁴ in family life education described the characteristics of the “companionship family” which was now replacing the traditional “institutional family.” In this new type of family that was held by “inner feelings and sentiments” not by “external pressures,” more “permissive and democratic” relations were constructed between husband and wife and parent and child. Instead of forcing family members to subordinate their personal wants and interests to family goals, the companionship family placed emphasis on the self-expression of each family member.²⁵

Responding to Burgess, a county curriculum consultant and two local homemaking education authorities discussed appropriate ways in which the schools should help pupils handle conflicting family values, practices, and customs and to “build the constructive attitudes that [made] for happier living.”²⁶ The contributors all agreed that every pupil had to have an opportunity to receive family-life education. The problem was how to involve all pupils. In many schools family-life education was a part of homemaking courses.²⁷ Ideally, in the mind of home economists, all youths took homemaking. Olive A. Hall, who taught home economics at the University of California at Los Angeles wrote in an introductory book for college home economics students that “homemaking education should reach all people and should not be designed just for women.” This was one of the fundamental principles of home economics that had gained widespread approval by the late 1950s from colleges and universities offering home

²⁰ Ibid., p. 329, pp. 333-36.

²¹ United States Office of Education: *Vitalizing Secondary Education: Report of the First Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth* (Washington, 1951) p. 1, qtd. in Cremin, p. 336.

²² In 1946 at the earlier stage of the movement, “home and family life” education was designated as one of the fundamental subjects that should be emphasized in life adjustment training along with subjects such as health and fitness, and civic competence. Cremin, p. 335.

²³ “Symposium: The Changing American Family: Implications for Secondary Schools,” *California Journal of Secondary Education*, 31.4 (1956): 230-47.

²⁴ Ellen Terry Stookey, “Symposium: The Changing American Family,” p. 230.

²⁵ Ernest W. Burgess, “The Changing American Family,” in “Symposium: The Changing American Family,” pp. 231-236.

²⁶ Frances Hall Adams, “Teaching About the Family in the Secondary School,” in “Symposium: the Changing American Family,” p. 237.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 239.

economics.²⁸ But this agreement among home economic educators in higher education did not guarantee its effective implementation at the secondary level. In practice, homemaking education in secondary schools was offered almost exclusively to girls. In California, during the school year 1952-53 less than 20 percent of the public secondary schools offered homemaking courses to boys. Accordingly, the enrollment of boys in homemaking was limited. Only 5 percent of boys were enrolled in homemaking classes while 40 percent of girls were.²⁹ There were three solutions to the problem of gender restriction. The schools could newly invent some inclusive family education program that would be required of all pupils. If they sought to guarantee that all students received some kind of family-life education within the existing school curriculum, they had two choices: family life education could rely on other areas that were required for all pupils, or homemaking could be made available to boys.

Mary O. Fleming, a city supervisor of Home and Family Education reported that in the Pasadena City schools certain segments of family life education had been already taught in existing required courses, such as “English-social” studies, mathematics, biology and psychology, making sure that all boys and girls learned something about family life. But the city educators and administrators felt the need to offer a more inclusive Home and Family Education program. After a certain period of experimentation and discussion, the “basic senior courses” were introduced in 1956. All twelfth-graders were required to choose one of four “Basic Senior Courses,” all of which included three common elements: a study of student government, vocational guidance, and home and family education. Each Basic Senior Course had one of the following specific areas taught in combination with the basic elements: Economics, Consumer Mathematics, Psychology, and Sociology.³⁰ The Pasadena City project had characteristics of life adjustment education in three respects. First, although all students had to participate, they had four choices. Based upon the recognition that students resisted required courses,³¹ the program avoided an authoritarian attitude. Second, the teachings of student government and vocational guidance as well as family living also supported the theory of life adjustment education that aimed to prepare young people to profit in “society as home members, workers, and citizens.” Finally, this kind of merger between academic subjects and subjects emphasizing everyday utility was encouraged by the life-adjustment movement.³²

Another possibility was that boys and girls would be taught different but related aspects of family living in separate programs. Boys could take family life education in industrial arts courses while girls were taking homemaking. What boys learned in industrial arts was supposed to supplement what girls studied in homemaking. This dual program materialized at the Jordan Junior High School in Palo Alto, California which witnessed the interdepartmental cooperation between homemaking for girls and industrial arts for boys in the 1950s. However, their cooperation neither meant that boys and girls learned about family living together, nor that they were allowed to choose what they studied crossing the gender line.³³ In other schools,

²⁸ Olive A. Hall, *Home Economics Careers and Homemaking* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, Inc., 1958), pp. 8-9.

²⁹ Hall, “Homemaking Education for Boys in California,” *California Journal of Secondary Education* 30.7 (1955): 391-92.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 245-47.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

³² Ravitch, p. 82.

³³ Rather, in the Jordan Junior High Project, Mrs. Sadie Fay in homemaking taught girls home arrangement and decoration while Mr. David T. Downs in industrial arts taught boys architectural drawing and construction. Fay

homemaking teachers tried to teach boys as well as girls. Frances Hall Adams, a county curriculum consultant in Los Angeles suggested that boys and girls should learn together in the same classrooms when they worked on problems they faced in family life. In the emerging companionship family, the cooperation between husband and wife was “free and voluntary,” not derived from a sense of “duty”³⁴ and the trend seemed to be towards equality between husband and wife.³⁵

In actual homemaking classrooms in the mid-1950s, however, boys and girls were not learning to perform identical domestic roles.³⁶ The schools offered separate classes rather than integrated ones for practical reasons. They found that separate classes could be adapted for boys’ needs more effectively by “selecting the subject matter wisely” and “approaching problems from the boys’ viewpoint.” The goal of homemaking education for boys was to teach them the “contribution a man [made] to the family life, child development, etc.” so that “so much emphasis on physical care” should be avoided.³⁷ Another practical reason for separating boys and girls was that boys required “screening carefully.” Since boys were seen to be less willing to think about future family life, special consideration was needed to attract boys’ interest. The classes for boys should be designed to include activities to “[keep] them busy every minute.” Because the teachers found, “anything that is not edible is uninteresting” to boys, a home management unit had to be taught as a part of the foods unit.³⁸

Another important difference in the experience in homemaking between boys and girls is found in their reason for taking homemaking courses. If boys chose to learn homemaking, it was more likely their own decision, while girls took it as requirement or a given.³⁹ Nearly half of the 35 administrators who reported found that it was the boys themselves who wanted to have the opportunity to take homemaking.⁴⁰

It can hardly be said that boys were integrated in to the homemaking courses at this stage. Although educators agreed that boys as well as girls needed to receive family life education, and homemaking education assumed the primary responsibility for it, boys’ enrollment in homemaking was quite limited in the 1950s. In California, only 5 percent of boys were enrolled in the mid-1950s. Even the boys who took homemaking were not fully involved in homemaking

reported that the most popular class activity among the girls was the construction of a miniature room. While the girls were to be satisfied with a miniature room, the boys in industrial arts were encouraged to build an actual house. The teachers explained, “it may be possible to take one of the boy’s completed model homes and have the girls do the interior decorating.” Andrew C. Stevens, Sadie Fay, and David T. Downs, “Interdepartmental Co-operation in Junior High School Family Life Education,” *California Journal of Secondary Education* 30.7 (1955): 386-390.

³⁴ Burgess, p. 235.

³⁵ Adams, pp. 237-38.

³⁶ A survey of the public secondary schools in California that offered homemaking classes for boys shows that boys and girls were more often taught in separate classes than in mixed classes. Less than one-third of the schools reporting had mixed classes while nearly 85 percent offered separate classes. And in most of the former cases, separate classes coexisted with the mixed. Hall, “Homemaking Education for Boys in California,” p. 392.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 392-94.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

³⁹ Even in Pasadena City schools where all seniors had to learn Home and Family Education as part of requirements for graduation, homemaking was taught as electives for boys while it was required of girls. All seventh-grade girls had to take a homemaking course. Boys were allowed to take homemaking starting at the ninth grade. Fleming, p. 244.

⁴⁰ Voices of boys who took homemaking courses are not recorded in this survey, so it is difficult to reach the real motivation of boys for taking homemaking. One homemaking teacher commented that in the foods and nutrition class for boys the presence of real food was indispensable because “some simply want[ed] to eat and dislike[d] any book work or explanation.” Hall, “Homemaking Education for Boys in California,” pp. 391-94.

classes either. There were separate programs for boys, where they learned homemaking from the men's point of view. Boys received special treatment from homemaking teachers who feared losing boys' interest. The teachers emphasized boys' accomplishments. And above all boys were neither forced to participate in homemaking classes nor in actual housework. Their participation was mostly voluntary. Unlike women stepping into traditional men's fields, boys appear to have been more than welcomed in this traditional women's sphere. At the same time, the gender line was recognized and maintained by those who were involved in the attempt to include boys in homemaking.

2. In the "Pursuit of Excellence:" Home Economics as Science for the Gifted

As long as the goal and nature of homemaking education were consistent with the dominant principles of secondary education in general, home economists did not need to defend its status in the secondary school curriculum. The value of homemaking education in secondary schools was readily explained within the framework of life adjustment education.

By the late 1950s, however, the dominance of progressivism in American education completely collapsed. Life adjustment education had already been suspect for its anti-intellectualism by the 1940s. During the immediate postwar years, the threat of communist expansionism and the growth of an industrial economy created the demands for "trained and intelligent manpower."⁴¹ By the mid-1950s the attacks on the life-adjustment movement became so intense that in 1954, on the dissolution of the second Commission on Life Adjustment Education for Youth, no new commission was appointed.⁴² But it was not until Russia's launching of Sputnik I in 1957 that the whole nation faced the "crisis" of American education.

The news of the Russia's orbiting of Sputnik made Americans finally "[discover]" a "new crisis."⁴³ The Congress, the media and the public charged that their defeat in the competition with the Soviets for scientific and technological supremacy was caused by the inadequacy of American education. Progressive education had ignored science, mathematics, and foreign languages⁴⁴ while it focused on useful knowledge. The schools had aimed to meet the needs of all pupils at the expense of the needs of the gifted. The Rockefeller Brothers Report on education titled *The Pursuit of Excellence* published in 1958 concluded that the proper development of human resources would be enabled by successful cultivation of "the ideals of excellence."⁴⁵ The same year the Congress passed the National Defense Education Act to give more emphasis to science, mathematics, and foreign languages.⁴⁶

The new public mood and the shift in educational goals forced home economics to reconsider its obligation in secondary education and reassess its reasons for existence. It was widely assumed that homemaking was a useful not an academic subject. Home economics teachers had been quite unsatisfied with this and tried to deny the public reputation that the primary object of home economics was the development of specific skills in homemaking,

⁴¹ Cremin, pp. 338-39.

⁴² Cremin, p. 338.

⁴³ Ibid., p. 46.

⁴⁴ Ibid., p. 4

⁴⁵ Rockefeller Brothers Fund, *The Pursuit of Excellence: Education and the Future of America* (New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1958), p. 15, p. 17.

⁴⁶ Vincenti, "Chronology of Events and Movements Which Have Defined and Shaped Home Economics," in *Rethinking Home Economics*, p. 326.

typically in cooking and sewing.⁴⁷

In the late 1950s home economists and homemaking teachers had to struggle with this widespread image of homemaking more vigorously. If life adjustment education could not survive, homemaking education which fitted its principles would not be able to maintain a secure position in the secondary school curriculum. How did home economists react to this challenge? In 1959 Olive A. Hall, an assistant professor of home economics at the University of California at Los Angeles wrote an article titled "Home Economics and the Sciences" in the *California Journal of Secondary Education*, in which she claimed a strong connection between home economics and sciences. In the beginning of the article, Hall stated that the growing emphasis on mathematics and science was "vital for the survival of democracy." Then she claimed that this new trend could have dangerous consequences if the schools pursued it at the expense of the kind of education aimed at raising "a well-rounded individual in a well-adjusted family and community setting," which was what home economics was all about. This argument seemed to imply that home economics had its own quality and value in the secondary school curriculum. However, later in the article, she sought to prove the value of home economics education by emphasizing its strong ties to academically prestigious subjects, especially to the sciences. One of the basic principles underlying the home economics curriculum was, she stated, that home economics was the study that applied scientific understanding to the solution of home and family problems. In fact, home economics majors in college were learning various science subjects such as human physiology, inorganic and organic chemistry as their prerequisite courses. While she defined home economics as applied science, she clearly rejected the common misconception that home economics taught only specific skills. In addition, Hall pointed out that home economics had been offering opportunities to women who wanted careers in scientific fields. Apparently, she showed more interest in attracting "capable students" to home economics who could contribute to the "world of science and technology" than in offering all pupils opportunities to benefit from home economics.⁴⁸

Hall appears to have claimed the stable position of home economics in school curricula by presenting home economics as a field of applied science and not as a field for family life education. The objective of home economics was to raise professional home economists with a strong scientific background and not to prepare all pupils for homemaking. Apparently what she was defending was not the homemaking education that had been taught in secondary schools until the late-1950s. When she pointed out that home life in the contemporary society needed more scientific knowledge, she could have argued that conventional homemaking education in secondary schools was satisfying the needs of "the general public" by giving all young people basic knowledge in sciences necessary for the changing family life. Instead, she took the new needs in home life as another opportunity for scientifically trained professional home economists. Home economics-trained journalists should assist the general public by disseminating the scientific knowledge needed to keep pace with the developments in contemporary home life.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Eleanora Petersen, a staff member of the Department of Home Economics, University of California, Los Angeles, reporting a study of parental attitudes toward homemaking in secondary schools conducted in the 1950s in California, found that the parents misunderstood homemaking education and associated it with cooking and sewing. Eleanora L. Petersen, "Parental Attitudes toward the Homemaking Program in Secondary Schools of California," *California Journal of Secondary Education* 32.1 (1957): 18-19.

⁴⁸ Hall, "Home Economics and the Sciences," *California Journal of Secondary Education* 34.2 (1959): 88-90.

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

These arguments that appeared in the secondary educational journal published in 1959 were in contrast with what she wrote in the general introductory book for college home economics students two years before. As its title *Home Economics: Careers and Homemaking* indicates, she gave emphasis to both a homemaking education for all and a home economics education for “some students” who wished to “[earn] a living in a career related to home economics.” While she introduced the students to a variety of home economics-related gainful professions and encouraged the students to prepare properly for them, she emphasized the importance of home economics education as preparation for marriage and home life.⁵⁰

Hall’s book also paid attention to careers in teaching, business, and research. However, it is clearly different from her article, “Home Economics and the Sciences” in terms of emphasized objectives of home economics education and its target group. In “Home Economics and the Sciences,” which was written after Sputnik, she stressed the academic quality of home economics. College students in home economics learned the sciences as the foundation for further specialized study in home economics. The target group of home economics education for preparation for careers in science-related fields would be talented young women. Therefore, the important mission of home economics teachers in secondary schools was to “[motivate] capable students to major in home economics” and “[prepare] them to make a significant contribution to our world of science and technology.”⁵¹ In contrast, in *Home Economics: Careers and Homemaking* she explained to college students who were interested in teaching in elementary and secondary schools that the major duty of homemaking teachers was to “prepare students for all phases of home and family living.”⁵²

Why did Hall change her points so quickly? The article was written after Sputnik. The book was also published after Sputnik but she probably did not have time to revise the contents that she had already written before the event. Besides, the anticipated readers of “Home Economics and the Sciences” were different from those of the introductory book. In the article that appeared in the professional secondary education journal, she had to convince educators, school administrators, and secondary school teachers of other subjects of the value of the presence of home economics in the secondary school curriculum. A subject emphasizing all children’s needs and utility could no longer gain support. For this purpose, she needed to redefine the home economics education. A new home economics program should aim to train some qualified students in scientific careers.

As is often the case with those who speak from above, the discrepancy between what was needed in daily management of classrooms in high schools or even in colleges on the one hand and how the college home economist chose to project her profession and discipline on the other seems visible here. Hall attempted to justify home economics in contemporary school curricula by defining it as science for academically capable students and by emphasizing its professionalism. But Hall must have been aware of the risk involved in overemphasizing the scientific credibility of home economics. In Berkeley, the university administration had criticized the department of home economics for years for maintaining scientific rigor, on the ground that this approach was not suitable for women. Paradoxically, however, the department of home economics was dismantled in the late 1950s largely because home economics was not academically “prestigious”

⁵⁰ Hall, *Home Economics: Careers and Homemaking*, pp. 77-78, pp. 80-82.

⁵¹ Hall, “Home Economics and the Sciences,” p. 90.

⁵² Hall, *Home Economics: Careers and Homemaking*, p. 93.

enough to stay in Berkeley that was aspiring to be counted “among first-ranking institutions.” When home economics was moved to Davis, the most scientifically prestigious portion of the department, nutritional science, “was severed from home economics and retained by the Berkeley campus.”⁵³ The lesson here was obvious. From the perspective of those outside the profession, home economics could lose its identity by becoming overly scientific.

Nevertheless, as a theory, reclaiming home economics as a science seems to have been a valid strategy to explain why home economics education for college students and college-bound high school students was serving the contemporary society’s needs. By this time, it was widely recognized that science and math education at the secondary level for the gifted had to be strengthened. Home economics as a science would be able to be included here, at least in the mind of home economists. A modern technological society required professional home economists with a strong scientific background. Importantly, however, this kind of argument was not directly related to the value of home economics for terminal high school students. The latter’s needs had to be argued from a different point of view.

3. The Needs of Disadvantaged Students: Home Economics for Occupational Training

Home economics for terminal high school students underwent a significant transformation in the 1960s in terms of its obligation and emphasis. In the 1960s homemaking education in secondary schools had become only a part of a more broadly conceived home economics program. A new objective of home economics was to train those who completed their education at the secondary school level to be gainfully employable. Again, the addition of this dimension to home economics education was not immediately agreed upon by all home economists.⁵⁴ Half a century before, the Smith-Hughes Act of 1917 determined that home economics was a vocational subject in secondary schools, without consulting home economists enough.⁵⁵ Home economists were left with no choice but to adapt it to serve the new vocational purpose given from outside of the profession. In the 1960s too, it does not seem that the vocational orientation originated in the inner circle of home economists, although some of them must have been interested in vocational training for some time. Rather, home economists in the 1960s were forced to deal with the dual responsibilities of home economics education in secondary schools — home economics for homemaking and home economics for occupational training — by the passage of new federal legislation. The important difference of the 1963 amendments from the previous laws was that home economics was included as an occupational study that aimed to prepare students for gainful employment.⁵⁶

From the viewpoint of promoters of vocational education, however, the role that home economics courses in secondary schools, especially those in public schools, had to assume in the occupational training of girls was undoubtedly significant. The Women’s Bureau Bulletin

⁵³ Nerad, pp. 162-63.

⁵⁴ When the National Conference on Issues in Home Economics Education was held in 1963, the Vocational Education Amendments were about to be signed by the president. Still the attending educators in the conference had not reached agreement on whether it was desirable for home economics to assume a role in occupational education defined as preparatory training in wage-earning jobs. Dorothy S. Lawson, “Education for Homemaking and for Employment,” *Contemporary Issues in Home Economics: A Conference Report* (Coordinating Council of AHEA-AVA-DHE/NEA: Washington, D.C., 1965), p. 33.

⁵⁵ For more on the process of “political negotiations” on the Smith-Hughes Bill, see Apple.

⁵⁶ Lawson, p. 92.

published in 1960 emphasized the responsibility of vocational courses in the public high schools. The public schools could provide free occupational training for all girls. Besides, home economics courses were “the best developed and most widely standardized of all the training resources available” to girls.⁵⁷ In response to this demand, exploratory programs of occupational training in home economics-related jobs had already been launched in some public schools in the late 1950s. In California, Berkeley High School had a pilot program of occupational training in food service in 1957.⁵⁸

Among the participants in the National Conference on Contemporary Issues in Home Economics Education in 1965, the educators who supported, or at least accepted, the new emphasis on home economics as occupational training for gainful employment claimed that it was in the best interests of girls. Dorothy S. Lawson from the New York State Department of Education stated at the conference that home economics in secondary schools should assume the dual responsibilities for homemaking and vocational education in order to meet the needs of girls for whom high school was their terminal education. Lawson was very clear about the new mission of home economics education in secondary education. It was to prepare young women for “a dual responsibility as homemakers and wage earners.”⁵⁹

Homemaking courses that taught specific skills and knowledge that were also useful in job situations already existed, but such courses were not equivalent to the occupational home economics programs that the 1963 amendments pressured schools to create. First, the goal of home economics for gainful employment was “to secure and hold a job.” Accordingly, the curriculum should be designed to teach the skills and abilities needed for a specific occupation. In contrast, the curriculum of home economics primarily for homemaking was “broad in scope and content.” Second, unlike home economics for homemaking, wage-earning programs were neither for all pupils nor for all communities. To direct students to appropriate occupations, their “qualities and aptitudes” had to be considered in the selection of enrollees in wage-earning programs specified for certain jobs.⁶⁰ Planners of wage-earning programs also needed to carefully study employment opportunities in the community. A specific job-oriented program would not be useful if there was no demand for the job.⁶¹

While the new occupational home economics programs would screen out some students in the selection process, they were designed to involve those who could not benefit from regular home economics programs. Lawson reported on newly planned occupational home economics programs in New York State. Students who were planning to leave before graduation and those who would stay were taught in differently designed programs. To the former a two-year occupational home economics program would be offered. In the ninth grade, pupils were given work experience through a part-time job while they learned knowledge needed to hold a job such as “personal appearance,” “relationships on the job,” and “management at home and work.” In

⁵⁷ “Training Opportunities for Women and Girls: Preemployment Courses: Initial Training Programs,” Women’s Bureau Bulletin 274 (U.S. Department of Labor, Washington D.C.: 1960), 7-8. About 14,000 of the 25,000 public secondary schools in the country had some kind of vocational courses in the school year 1958-59.

⁵⁸ Helen S. Poulsen, “Current Events and Materials in Homemaking Education,” *California Journal of Secondary Education* 33.7 (1958), p. 411-12.

⁵⁹ Lawson, pp. 33-35.

⁶⁰ For example, to participate in the Berkeley High School occupational training program in food service, which was designed for seniors who would enter the labor market upon graduation, students must have completed a foods class and proved some ability in this area. Poulsen, p. 412.

⁶¹ Lawson, pp. 35-36.

the tenth year, they were trained in any of the 5 specified service areas: child care services, clothing services, food services, home furnishings services, home and institutional services. Throughout the two-year program, the primary objective was to make the pupils employable before they left school and work experience was highly recommended.⁶²

While educators and home economics teachers were faced with the new challenge placed by the 1963 act and sought to strengthen the occupational aspect of home economics education, the trend of American education was changing again. After the decade of the “pursuit of excellence,” to quote Ravitch, “the educational pendulum swung back towards a revival of progressivism.” By the mid-1960s the national and international political and social climate had changed. In the late 1950s and early 1960s, the threat of military conflicts with the USSR was real. By 1965 the Cold War seemed to be fading away. Meanwhile, domestic social developments shook “national self-confidence.” With the rise of Civil Rights Movements, the minority’s rights were discussed more earnestly than ever before. “The rediscovery of poverty” and the criticism of the U.S.A. involvement in the Vietnam War also contributed to the national mood of resistance and uncertainty. All these developments contributed to the shift in American schools. During the following 10 years, individualized learning, learning through actual experience, informal relationships between teachers and students and the elimination of required courses characterized the American “good school.”⁶³

The occupational home economics programs in New York State were designed to help pupils who otherwise would not have opportunities to prepare for their future employment. They stressed the importance of work experience. Lawson reported on them in 1965 at the National Conference on home economics education. Clearly, the New York State programs fitted the emerging direction of American secondary school education. The planners of the programs not only created wage-earning preparation programs that met the governmental requirements but also adapted them for the social climate of the time. Now the needs of each individual pupil should be carefully taken into consideration. Disadvantaged or academically handicapped students should be properly taken care of. These tendencies became more conspicuous in occupational home economics programs under the 1968 Vocational Education Amendments. This law provided that a specified part of the funds had to be used for programs in depressed areas and areas of high levels of unemployment, thereby making vocational home economics responsible more specifically for education of students from lower-class families.⁶⁴

Aina E. Summerfelt, a city instructional consultant of home economics in San Diego, claimed that the 1968 Vocational Education Act required that home economics education should serve the needs of a broader population. Teaching methods such as independent study and flexible scheduling were useful to achieve this objective. Then she explained how occupational home economics was broadening the target group by reporting on an independent study program focusing on “the individual needs of the average and above-average students.”⁶⁵

It appears that Summerfelt tried to make sure that the new direction of home economics was serving the needs of academically capable pupils as well as disadvantaged students. However, it seems that even if some home economics educators sought to reach college-bound

⁶² Ibid., pp.37-39.

⁶³ Ravitch, pp. 80-81, pp. 84-87.

⁶⁴ Aina E. Summerfelt, “Individual Learning in Home Economics,” *Journal of Secondary Education* 45.4 (1970): 185.

⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 185.

students, occupational home economics was in its nature destined to deal with pupils who were not interested in academics. Besides, the combination of the emphasis on the occupational aspect of home economics and the special attention to the needs of the disadvantaged would have a serious consequence: occupational home economics in secondary schools would direct specified classes of pupils to certain categories of occupation.

In the mid-1960s, the discussion of occupational home economics focused on girls' interests. Since educators recognized that a large percent of girls who terminated their education at the secondary level would be employed outside the household, they figured that the development of sellable skills was in their best interest. In the mid-1960s, it seems that generally home economists did not expect that the dual responsibilities they took — preparing girls for homemaking and for wage work — would be severely criticized by feminists within the decade. That girls in home economics courses were trained to assume a double shift would soon be the target of criticism from the viewpoint of women's liberation. That girls were specifically singled out to enter home economics-related jobs would also be considered unacceptable by feminists. Although homemaking education in the 1950s was not very successful in involving boys, there was at least a consensus that boys needed to learn some aspects of homemaking. In the occupational home economics programs that developed in the mid-1960s, the possibility of boys' participation does not seem to have been discussed. It is likely that the growing emphasis on occupational home economics reinforced the image of home economics as women's field.⁶⁶

Along with the gender issue, home economics for gainful occupations included the problem of class stratification. The occupational training programs mentioned above were designed to meet the needs of disadvantaged students who quit school before completion as well as those who finished their education when they graduated from high school. This could mean that the hierarchy of pupils already well established in secondary schools by their difference in academic competence and economic conditions of the family, was cemented by introducing the economically disadvantaged into certain occupational areas — most probably in low-paid, so-called women's fields.

It can be said that home economics for wage-earning training at the secondary level was based upon the idea that disadvantaged students could be trained to take jobs which others in the community would not want. Joyce J. Terrass, who taught occupational education at Kansas State University made this point. Examining the enrollment of high school students in "home economics-related occupational (HERO) programs" in 1967 and 1972, she noted that the enrollment in "institutional and home management and services" had declined from 14,342 to 8,061 in spite of the fact that there was a great demand for workers in this service area. She asked home economists and home economics teachers: "Are we meeting labor market needs in this important area?" She realized that it was possible that the decrease in enrollment was due to the

⁶⁶ It should be noted here that by the mid-1970s occupational home economics resumed attempts to attract male students. By this time home economics education had come under sharp attack by advocates of women's emancipation. In 1975 an article in the *Journal of Home Economics* reported on a successful "alternative home economics program," an occupational home economics program at Metropolitan High School in Dallas aiming to "[let] dropouts 'drop in.'" This program, which had been started three years before, had over 100 enrollments each year. The article emphasized that boys as well as girls were involved. A picture of a boy knitting appeared with the caption "at Metro, male students can work in formerly 'female-oriented' activities without embarrassment. Barbara Ann Ware, "A Second Chance for High School Dropouts," *Journal of Home Economics* 67.1 (1975): 17-18, 20. Note that boys who were involved in occupational home economics in mid-1970s were limited to non-academically oriented students such as former dropouts seen in the case of the Metro.

lack of job appeal. She then stated that home economists could make the unpopular service area more appealing.⁶⁷ In the view of some educators such as Terrass, HERO programs aimed to encourage terminal high school students to prepare for occupations where shortages in the labor force was marked but to which students were not attracted.

Conclusion

The shift in the emphasis from homemaking education for all to vocational home economics for specific pupils — girls, high school terminal students, dropouts, and those from depressed communities — could have dangerous consequences for those who were concerned about the status of home economics in academic institutions. First of all, occupational training was not for all pupils. The growing emphasis on an occupational aspect of home economics would lead to the automatic loss of a significant portion of the pupils. Second, boys, academically-oriented pupils, and probably girls from the middle-class families who would not want low-paid jobs were missing in this revised concept of occupational home economics at the secondary level.

Home economics teachers had always been unsatisfied with and tried to deny the public reputation that the primary objective of home economics was the development of specific skills in homemaking. This reputation made the field extremely vulnerable to attack by critics of progressive education, especially those of life adjustment education. Although home economists and homemaking teachers did not like the widespread image of home economics teaching girls cooking and sewing, the status of homemaking in the secondary school curriculum was secure as long as life adjustment education maintained the considerable support of educators, parents, the government, and the general public. Homemaking in secondary schools could serve the interests of all pupils and no one would doubt its everyday utility. However, once the call for the “pursuit of excellence” determined the trend of American education, home economists had to modify their principles. Not surprisingly, Olive A. Hall, who presented home economics as a science after Sputnik, emphasized that home economics students were learning “the principles and philosophy” to be applied to home economics-related professional fields.⁶⁸ Then what happened to home economics when it was turned into a subject for job training for girls and the disadvantaged? While it was no longer an exclusively home life-oriented field, home economics could be an even less academic, less prestigious, and more exclusively girls’ field.

The status of home economics in schools was significantly affected by the new direction of home economics toward the emphasis on wage-earning training at the expense of family life education. Some viewed this movement positively. Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, a director of the Women’s Bureau stated in 1971 that by being more job-oriented, in response to the trend of women’s being employed outside their homes, home economics could raise its importance.⁶⁹ But even though this new direction would stabilize the place of home economics in some schools, home economics programs for preparing girls for gainful employment only served the interest of limited segments of secondary school students.

⁶⁷ Joyce J. Terrass, “Let’s Get Going with Occupational Home Economics!” *Journal of Home Economics* 66.2 (1974): 23-24.

⁶⁸ Hall, “Home Economics and Sciences,” pp. 88-89.

⁶⁹ Elizabeth Duncan Koontz, “The Extension Worker and The Changing Role of Women,” *Journal of Home Economics*, 63.8 (1971): 588.

Therefore the transformation in the nature of home economics in the 1960s would be able to undermine the status of home economics at least in high schools as academic institutions. Once it was accepted that home economics courses in secondary schools were not useful and not necessary for all students, its place in the secondary school curriculum could not be stable. In addition, while it was easy to criticize conventional homemaking education on the grounds that it was opposed to women's liberation objectives, occupational home economics for girls and the disadvantaged would be even more vulnerable to such criticism. Although home economics courses with emphasis on family life education did not integrate boys, it at least attempted to offer a program for boys. What occupational home economics did in the 1960s was to gather girls, dropouts, and students in depressed areas into the same kind of projects. They all were to prepare for underpaid, unwanted, women's jobs.

Home economics programs as redefined in this manner served the educational goal of reproducing the efficient work force. This is one of the goals of American education explained by David F. Labaree, a scholar of historical sociology of education. American schools have pursued the sometime mutually exclusive goals of "*democratic equality, social efficiency, and social mobility.*"⁷⁰ It can be argued that if home economics of the 1960s aimed at training selected high school students in their future occupational roles, it gave full support to the goal of "social efficiency" and contributed to economic and social stratification, if not gender stratification, of the labor market. At the same time, by taking this path, the academic value of home economics was further undermined. In theory, there was still a way left for home economists to avoid the fate of dissolution while enhancing their academic prestige; by changing the subject matter of their education and renaming their profession. One might wonder what the difference was between "quitting their jobs" and changing the name and subject matter. But this path was in fact what the profession would be taking toward the end of the twentieth century.

⁷⁰ David F. Labaree, "Public Goods, Private Goods: The American Struggle Over Educational Goals," *American Educational Research Journal* 34.1(1997): 41-43.