

Nickols, S. Y., & Kay, G. (Eds.). (2015). *Remaking home economics: Resourcefulness and innovation in changing times*. Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press. 288 pp.

Review by Ann Vail

As a lover of history and a student of the home economics profession, I anxiously awaited the publication of this book. At a time when numerous institutions that are part of or related to home economics are celebrating significant anniversaries of the Morrill Act, the establishment of the 1890s land-grant institutions, and the Cooperative Extension Service, the contributors to this volume continue the exploration of the historical and contemporary aspects of the profession of home economics. Although the profession has often been “misunderstood, trivialized, and under resourced,” as editors Nickols and Kay observe, “home economics has been addressing the persistent problems of daily life for more than a century” (p. 3). They and the chapter authors offer this book “to foster dialogue across disciplines in higher education and to facilitate discussion with a broader audience about the role of home economics in addressing the problems of everyday life” (p. 3).

The editors organized the book around four themes:

- home economics philosophy, social responsibility, and outreach to the public;
- food and clothing;
- gender and race in career experiences and preparation; and
- responses to challenges of identity and continuity of the field.

Home Economics Philosophy, Social Responsibility, and Outreach

The volume’s opening section provides an overview of the origin of the field and of a comprehensive system for the delivery of home economics–based knowledge. In “Knowledge, Mission, Practice: The Enduring Legacy of Home Economics” (Chapter 1), the authors explore three elements that have been constant across home economics from its beginning to the present day. They begin with a brief history and connect it to the evolution of knowledge, mission, and practice. Chapter 2, “Extending Knowledge, Changing Lives: Cooperative Extension Family and Consumer Sciences,”

traces the presence and role of home economics in government specifically through the Cooperative Extension Service, which has connections to federal, state, and local governments. The authors connect the people to the people's universities in this chapter. Next, Rima Apple explores "Home Economics in the Twentieth Century: A Case of Lost Identity" (Chapter 3). She argues that over the last century home economics has lost its one essential characteristic—social justice—and suggests that "an analysis of the field's transformation can point the way toward redefinition and revitalization" (p. 54).

Food and Clothing

Collectively, the chapters of this section acknowledge that food and clothing occupy much of the popular culture's conversation around home economics, but assert that the real focus is "understanding and enabling individuals and families to meet these basic needs" (p. 71). In "Our Own Food: From Canning Clubs to Community Gardens" (Chapter 4), the authors provide a description of the social, economic, and environmental context for Cooperative Extension and the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) contributions to family food security through gardening and food preservation over the last two centuries. "Weighing in About Weight: Advisory Power in the Bureau of Home Economics" (Chapter 5) offers an early look into the public's obsession with weight and the reluctance of home economists to directly address the issue. It provides an example of an active public pressuring professional home economists to respond to their needs and interests related to weight. On the other end of the spectrum, in "From the War on Hunger to the Fight Against Obesity" (Chapter 6), Lewis, Laing, and Foss document the shift from "efforts to alleviate micronutrient deficiencies and malnutrition . . . [to] actions targeted at obesity and chronic disease management" (p. 109). They describe home economists' involvement in a public health approach to food security and the interrelationship between hunger and obesity.

"Home Economists and Women's Dress" (Chapter 7) traces USDA efforts to affect the ways women and children dressed and the department's role in making dress more democratic, as opposed to the European focus on dress and haute couture. Fast forward to today and "New Patterns for Women's Clothing: Consumption versus Sustainability" (Chapter 8) considers issues related to clothing consumption in today's environment, including environ-

mental, economic, and social costs. The author proposes roles for home economists in creating a sustainable future.

Race and Gender in Home Economics Careers

This section explores the intersections of institutional settings, employment, race, and gender as they relate to home economics. “It Was a Special Time: African American Deans of Family and Consumer Sciences in Predominantly White, Comprehensive Universities, 1987–2004” (Chapter 9) examines the opportunities, achievements, and challenges of three African American home economics deans, the first at White, comprehensive institutions. “Cookin’ With Gas’: Home Economists in the Atlanta Natural Gas Industry, 1950–1995” (Chapter 10) explores the work of home economists in a corporate culture and their role as liaisons with consumers and communities. The authors also discuss gender segregation in the workplace. Gender segregation is also a theme in Chapter 11, “Science Matters: Home Economics and STEM Fields of Study.” In this chapter, author Meszaros reviews the beginning of women’s role in science by tracing Ellen Swallow Richard’s growth and development as a scientist, which ultimately led to her leadership as a founder of the profession of home economics. The chapter ends with a description of a National Science Foundation project focused on opening STEM careers and pathways to girls and women and a role for home economics professionals.

Home Economics Identity and Continuity

The final section of the book responds to two thorny issues faced by the profession. The first of these is its name, which the field has struggled with from its inception. “Changing Names, Keeping Identity” (Chapter 12) traces events of the last 60 years, which have led to the most recent name change for several academic units and professional organizations and the resulting mission, vision, and scope of the profession. The author, Kay, includes a discussion of the tension between practitioners and higher education faculty and administrators, which remains unaddressed and unresolved. “Building a Legacy in Stone” (Chapter 13) describes the early history of the College of Human Ecology at Kansas State University. It concludes with a description of the threat posed by reorganization and elimination of home economics in the 1990s and the successful response by alumni, students, faculty, and staff to prevent its dissolution at Kansas State.

Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times concludes with “Looking Around, Thinking Ahead” (Chapter 14). In it, Nickols, Kay, and Collier suggest that current professionals reflect on the chapters in this book, look around, and think ahead to *remake home economics* for the future. They suggest that “home economics is a renewable resource for addressing the well-being of individuals, families, and communities” (p. 248). By thinking ahead, current professionals position the profession for another generation of home economists.

The importance of telling and knowing our history cannot be overestimated, but just as important to telling and knowing is the continuous critical examination of our history and use of new insights and interpretations to inform our actions today and in the future. Nickols and Kay contribute to the profession’s ongoing critical analysis of itself with an eye on the future. Their efforts also preserved some of the essential stories that contributed to who we are as a profession and who we are as a collection of professionals. The importance of this was brought home to me through an activity I have conducted for the last 6 years in the School of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Kentucky.

During each of the last 6 years, I have led a common reading experience among family and consumer sciences faculty, staff, and extension professionals. During 2015–2016, I used *Remaking Home Economics: Resourcefulness and Innovation in Changing Times* as the book for our common reading experience. I also invited members of the Kentucky Association of Family and Consumer Sciences to join us. The rich discussion of our history and the sharing of participants’ personal stories related to home economics provided valuable opportunities for each of us to examine our personal and collective history in the profession. Since the group was composed of active and retired professionals, we shared an exchange of interesting perspectives around relevance and public image.

For me as a reviewer, two unresolved issues emerged. First, I believe language matters. The selection of words and meanings of those words are critical to understanding the authors’ intent and critical to understanding the meaning the reader brings to the experience. Throughout my reading experience, I wished the authors had described the meaning of “remaking” home economics. *Why remaking? What did remaking mean that other words would not have meant?* An unpacking of remaking would have been insightful to the reader. An analysis of how each chapter contributed to “remaking” home economics was only mentioned in passing if at all. Both would have contributed to the reading experience.

The second issue, however, was acknowledged by the authors in the last chapter. The telling and knowing of the history of the home economics profession is often limited to predominantly White land-grant institutions, 1890s historically Black institutions, and White and African American professionals in eastern, Midwestern, and southern programs. Moxley provided the only mention of the western movement of home economics. Nickols, Kay, and Collier introduced us to Willie Lee Glass and Fabiola Cabeza de Baca Gilbert, two western, minority home economists who made significant contributions to the profession in their part of the United States. All of us can contribute to bringing forward the unknown individuals who made substantive contributions to the profession of home economics.

I nonetheless express my thanks and appreciation to Nickols and Kay and the 18 chapter authors who have created a written record of valuable leaders and events in the history of home economics. Their stories, insights, and thought-provoking questions will enable all readers to be better informed, but specifically, all home economists to be better in the practice of their chosen profession.

About the Reviewer

Ann Vail is professor and director of the School of Human Environmental Sciences at the University of Kentucky. For the past year, she has also served as the interim dean of the College of Social Work. Her research interests focus on teacher leadership and program evaluation. Her Ph.D. is from The Ohio State University in family and consumer sciences education.