

## Home Economics and its Institutionalization in the U.S: Reflections on Woman, Society, Knowledge and New Challenges

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### ABSTRACT

In this article I aim to analyse the institutionalization of domestic sciences in the US and its consequences to woman and to society. My main subject is the importance of the modern scientific process of intervention on social issues and how it did impact life of woman. Since the creation of land-grant colleges in 19th century, which initiated coeducation in America, until the foundation of modern universities of the 20th, domestic sciences, that would be called home economics, represented a special field of woman insertion into public space. The discourse of foundation of the US nation and the cultural construction of the American way of life and the American dream were strictly linked to the developing of woman and home. Early in 20th, the Taylorism had been applied to the houseworks. The science was become common at private sphere. Despite this apparent success, to some interpretations, this process destroyed the domesticity, one of the most important elements of woman identity. In 1950s and 1960s, housewife became target of advertisements and her subjectivity was bond only to the successful of home, children and husbands. Anyway, things were changing. Thus, how can we understand this process? After all, did these changes bad or good thing to health and development of woman and family?

**Keywords:** Home economics; woman; family; knowledge; contemporary challenges

### INTRODUCTION

Academic education was necessary prerequisite to successful homemaking, F. B. Cogan

This epigraph is notable. It is a fragment of Frances Cogan's book, *All-American Girl*, an important work of the American sociology on femininity in the 19<sup>th</sup> century (Cogan, 1989) [1]. Cogan's affirmation is from Catharine Beecher's theses, published and widespread among American reader public from *Treatise on Domestic Economy for the use to young ladies at home and at school* (1841). That book is considered the pioneer of *American Home Economics*.

Beecher was architect, theology and teacher and her trajectory is important in many areas such as children public education, domestic and familiar health. Beecher was one of the first women in the US to assume publicly *childhood need to be considered like an autonomy phase of formation of the human personality*. She used to defend the idea that children had to grow in a *free* and *childlike* environment, because that

way (and just that way) they would be able to turn into healthy and self-sufficient adults. According to her, childhood should be a privileged moment of moral and religious formation. If children would reach adulthood prematurely, they would not be able to receive a personal and citizen training, so it was not advisable to rush his maturity. From these ideas, it was created the first kindergartens in the United States.

In the *Treatise of Domestic Science*, woman is a heroine of

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puerile education, both at home and in kindergarten. Beecher suggests that women present an inherent kind of gift or an ontological idiosyncrasy for teaching, their nature being turned to education par excellence. Because that, their attention should be typically moral, intellectual, religious, and corporeal.

Women (and not men) should take up a child's education and build schools to teach boys and girls. Boys for business and girls to teach their children the education they had received. Later, Beecher published manuals on home governance, health, and family organization along with his sister Harriet Beecher. Their most important work of this type was *Housekeeper and Healthkeeper*, published in 1873.

## I

### Catharine Beecher and the beginning of Domestic Science

In the chapter I, Beecher affirms that woman was destined to be a special piece of American nation in order to create a prosperous and free society. Through the first lines of her treatise of home economics she writes:

There are some reasons, why American women should feel an interest in, the support of the democratic institutions of their Country, which it is important that they should consider. The great maxim, which is the basis of all our civil and political institutions, is, that "all men are created equal" and that they are equally entitled to "life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness". But it can readily be seen, that this is only another mode of expressing the fundamental principle which the Great Ruler of the Universe has established, as the law of His eternal government (...) in a truly democratic state, each individual is allowed to choose for himself, who shall take the position of his superior (BEECHER, 1842, p. 26) [2].

The author evokes Jefferson and the words of the American Independence liking them to a religious ideal. Next, she goes back to the civic world where is that woman whom rights are ensured by republican law, as well as it is to man. Beecher suggests the existence of huge freedom of decision to woman, putting away the traditional idea of female natural subordination. According to her: "no woman is forced to obey any husband but the one she chooses for herself; nor is she obliged to take a husband, if she prefers to remain single" (BEECHER, 1842, p. 27) [2].

That way, woman would be free to decide to get marry or not. However, once she makes the first choice, she would be bound to obey *her* husband. But it does not mean she would need to obey man in general. Beecher's theory does not consider woman as a natural being to be controlled and submitted by man like it used to be in her time. According to her, the commitment of married woman was above dedicated to the success of the republic itself. From this, emerges the ideal of *republican motherhood*, stated since the beginning

by the *American founding fathers*. Following this ideology, woman (and not man!) would have a natural skill to spread republican and christianistic moral, being these, par excellence, very important to ensure the development of political virtuous and patriotism.

## II

### Woman and the project of the housewife

The concept of woman presents by that ideology evokes a notion of social harmony and it can be observed on political discourses of the *American way of life*. Robert Darnton (1996) has noticed, for example, *founding fathers* gave a special connotation to the natural rights [3]. This way, when Jefferson declared humankind has inalienable rights among which one of the most important is the pursuit of happiness, he was stating the original Locke idea of the unrestricted right to conquest the property by work. Thus, the right to property is not a presupposition of a *meta-existence*, so to speak, but rather of its connection with a *concrete social action*. According this reasoning, natural and individual rights would be closely linked to the country's notion of commitment, which is the fundamental principle of its legitimacy and effectiveness. Hence, the commitment to the nation becomes one of the most important notions of citizenship and individuation.

The American way of life was defined by the social role of the individual next to the nation. In this conception the citizen is inserted in a social structure on which he has supreme civil responsibility. When the immigrants arrived bringing with them the American Dream they knew that entering into the modern American adventure was, first of all, joining the nation and following its rules. The ideal of the American dream was linked to hard work. Thus, the measure of it was the measure of the individual efforts to ensure the social order and the nation itself. As James Truslow Adams points out in the classic *Epic of America*, published in 1931, the American dream does not mean an isolated personal quest, an individual dream, but a pursuit for "(...) social order in which each man and each woman shall be able to the fullest stature of which they are innately capable, and be recognized by others for what they are, regardless of the fortuitous circumstances of birth or position" (ADAMS, 1931, pp. 214-215) [4].

As we can notice, it does not about considering natural positions, but skills and commitment. Thus, doing define being and not the opposite. It means hard work and notable efforts are in order to support the nation. Beecher defends this idea in her *Treatise* categorically even because her whole life was dedicated to celibate and education. In her own words: Every great and good undertaking ordinarily begins, like the grain of mustard-seed, with a humble, unnoticed growth; and the greater the enterprise to be achieved, the greater are the obstacles to be surmounted by

its pioneer laborers (BEECHER *apud* HARVESON, 1932, p. s/n).

Glenna Matthews observes the average 19<sup>th</sup> American woman, educated to become a housewife should embody the patriotic and objective ideal of a nation compromise that went beyond her subjectivities. Thus, being a family woman, ready to be a good wife and mother, implied a commitment beyond the space of the house which appeared as a social achievement. "In 1850 a housewife knew she was essential not only to her family but also to her society. History would be affected by cumulative impact of women creating good homes" (MATTHEWS, 1987, p. 3) [5].

*Republican motherhood* would involve the formation of a very particular link between public and private universes. The operation is simple: once that it is very important to the governmental sphere people have certain virtues, such as moral education and preparation for citizenship, and considering these as feminine nature gifts, woman was rapidly recognized to be called to the public life. According to Zagarri (2001, p. 22), "women (...) shaped the behavior of their husband and children. They would inculcate patriotism, teach virtue, and encourage self-sacrifice for the public good".

In *Women of the Republic* Linda Kerber analyzes the process of the American Revolution from the republican ideal and through a feminine perspective, or, more precisely, from the perspective of women. Kerber criticizes the fact that army women, nurses, and other female employees in military hospitals, kitchens and laundries are the only ones who play the leading role in the history of the revolution. Kerber opens new curtains by noting that armies could recruit men without worrying (...) because women *bravely stayed on alone*, keeping family farms and mills in operation, fending off squatters, and protecting the family property by their heavy labor, often that grave physical risk (KERBER, 1980, p. xii, my emphasizes) [6].

The civilian women were also spies and informants, innkeepers, food suppliers, and dressers of great importance to the American victory. Kerber's research shows that patriotic men (willing to die on the front) were exactly the ones who could count on their wives and daughters to keep the farm and the family business.

Kerber uses sources like diaries, letters and legal records. These documents allowed her to realize the huge and important participation of women during the war. According to Kerber, American political theory failed to create a program for women's participation in the public sphere. Thus, other discourses would allow it by developing a true ideology of feminine patriotism. This ideal, shared by domestic economists in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, would spread the notion that women would be able to guarantee the health and longevity for the republic, feeding their sons and husbands with the public spirit of the revolution.

Female representations in the revolutionary mind show a kind of ambivalent woman. She is both Minerva, the Roman muse of intelligence, and Columbia, symbol of the prosperity of domestic labor. Minerva is the Roman correspondent of Athena, who was born from the head of Zeus, that is, of the sublime cunning that could only come in the Greek myth of a man. Minerva, like Athena, never married, which gives her a kind of divine purity that transcends the lives of real women destined to marriage and motherhood. According to Kerber, the paired female images of so many engravings of the Revolutionary era that show both Minerva, emblem of force and intelligence, and Columbia, surrounded by emblems of domestic work and prosperity suggest the difficulty of merging the two themes. A synthesis was needed that would facilitate women's entry into politics without denying women's commitment to domesticity (KERBER, 1980, p. xii) [6].

Then, it was necessary to create a formula which would call woman to the public space without denying her commitment with the domestic space. That is the reasoning: generates a species of woman who would be inserted into the public sphere in order to exercise her civil commitment to the nation performing domestic and private activities such as moral education and nursing.

Even before the publication of her *Treatise*, Catherine Beecher had created seminars to women and idealized many female courses. The excellence of her work could be observed in her proposals of institutionalization, professionalization and scientification of social tasks (or, more precisely, social roles) of woman. The author would have struggled originally for something which was not common to be defended by the feminism of her time. Both men and women could deny her ideas but Beecher would become the most emphatic and enthusiastic among the American "missionaries", pioneers of domestic science, a work by and for women.

Cogan points out that, different from someone might think by a primary analysis of Catharine Beecher's treatise, the book is quite not merely a set of generalizations. Indeed, the pioneer of the domestic sciences in America explores details of matters such as chemistry, hygiene, therapy and electricity, ventilation and structure of fireplaces, waterproofing of shoes, as well as all many the others one (COGAN, 1989, p. 86-87) [1]. Her trajectory and struggle for the insertion of women into the universe of science and education justifies the phrase in our epigraph: "Academic education was necessary prerequisite to successful homemaking".

Later, home economics, inserted in the field of the applied social sciences, would become an essential component of American social formation during the Progressive Era, observed in interwar period, mainly in the context of the Wall Street crash and, following, in the Welfare State period. By now, we must return to the institutional origins of

the home economics in order to understand it within the framework of the creation of the land-grant college.

### III

#### Ellen Richards and the institutionalization of Home Economics

It was time of changes: the 1820s, 1830s, 1840s and 1850s. The wind was blowing westward, and the farmer's democracy was consolidating Jefferson's dream which was already seen in the Louisiana acquisition: the creation of a large society of philosophers-farmers. Publicists as Horace Greeley used to say energetically: "Go West, Young Man!" (DARNTON, 1996) [3].

In July 1862, when the Unionists were enlarging their military forces against the Confederates and the Civil War was becoming a really destructive conflict, President Abraham Lincoln signed an act which would give a new focus to the land issue and its acquisition in the US. The Morrill Act was one of the most important decisions of the government that period. It was part of a broader plan proposed by Senator Justin Smith Morrill from Vermont State. The Morrill Land-Grant Acts covered the abovementioned Morrill Act of 1862 and the Morrill Act of 1890. One complemented the other. The goal was to make land available to state governments (30,000 acres) in order to it could be sold freely to private companies. The funds of the selling would have to be used building colleges for the pragmatic education of farmers' sons and daughters.

The Land-grant College, as those colleges was called, pioneered the deployment of coeducation in the United States. It was an important government grant to foster the education of farmers' sons and daughters. The grant was originally created to establish institutions that would provide higher education in agriculture, home economics, mechanical arts, and other skills. The first land-grant would become major universities in the United States, such as Iowa, Purdue, Cornell and Florida.

They started in a kind of "missionary vision of progress" carried out by both men and women: to boys, studies of agricultural itself, to girls, domestic science and family caring, health and home organization and development. Aiming the application of new technologies to rural family organization, this proposal intended to take academic knowledge to agrarian issue, and to rural family reality, targeting its improvement in the creation of children and in the consolidation of a national morality, financial organization, familiar nutrition, cleaning and rational using of resources (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5].

Domestic arts, as it was known, were offered to female students who used to take other courses with male students and not separated instead. English (including literature, rhetoric and grammar), Mathematics (including trigonometry), Chemistry, Physics, Accounting, Geology

(including mineralogy), Botany, Zoology, Physiology, Entomology, Civil Government, Moral Science and Languages, they composed the group of disciplines that were work with those students. French was especially recommended for women because it was the international language for fashion and decoration circles. In addition, French terms were used in the domestic market more than in any other language. German, on the other hand, was directed to men because Germany was a world reference in high technology agricultural products. Specially destined to girls, the curricula of domestic arts were aimed to cutting and sewing courses and knowledge related to cooking, including food chemistry and nutrition fundamentals. Dairy (the art of making butter and cheese) was also given only to women. Horticulture, plants, and gardens were prescribed as optional curricula in domestic arts, as well as reading, speaking, mechanical drawing, photography, fantasy, music and painting.

The term "home economics" was created during the first Lake Placid Conference held in 1899 in Essex County, New York. Before that, the expression "domestic arts" was more commonly employed, lasting until about 1908 when it was officially replaced by expression "home economics".

Ellen Richards, Isabel Bevier and others respected American academics in the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, met one another in Lake Placid in order to establish the bases of the American home economics. The Lake Placid Conferences were considered a success once they represented the force from which it was created the *American Home Economics Association*, today called the *American Family and Consumer Sciences Association*.

American Home Economics Association understood students who had taken home economics as career would not only be better prepared homemakers but also competent professionals in education, food industry, textile industry, hospitality industry, restaurant management and even organizations non-profit. Home economists started to be seen as an efficient springboard for a public career of respect. Katharine Alderman, remembering Melvil Dewey's words on the occasion of the first Conference of Lake Placid (1899), wrote in the cover editorial of the *Journal of Home Economics* that "those who can make the home all it should be will get nearer the foundations of life than even teachers, ministers and editors" [1].

The formalization of Home Economics and its institutionalization can be attributed to Ellen Richards. Ellen was born in Massachusetts in 1842, a year after the publication of the first edition of Beecher's *treatise*. Daughter of teachers, she had been educated at home. Her parents were farmers, so Ellen grew up in countryside. She learned early on to associate common problems with science. Ellen has become a talented cook, seamstress and noted gardener. She was also a voracious reader. She inclined to math, showing visible skills for organizing her

father's business in North Massachusetts merchants' outlets (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5].

The importance of Ellen Richards goes beyond a simple militant action in favor of science and the feminine insertion in its spectrum. Ellen became the mentor of a new conception of woman. Without taking domestic commitments from women, Richards, like Beecher, defended women's entry into public life through science and education, once again all in the name of national progress. Richards changed the traditional discourse of science by adapting it to the universe of home. She transformed her own house into a true laboratory, advocating a work, not only intuitive but rational, effective and pleasurable. According to Maria de Fátima Lopes (1995, p. 77), Brazilian researcher and professor, the pioneer "believed that a housewife provided by scientific knowledge could eliminate the monotony of domestic doing and perform it with the pleasure and intelligence of an experiment" [2].

During the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the following western modern societies passed by a systematic effort to make all human activities object of study and scientific investigation and, consequently, to convert their doing into a professional activity. In that context home economics had deal with a complex reality because the most common ways to consolidate the scientific fields were the exclusion of amateurism, valuating abstract knowledge rather than traditional experiences. As Matthews (1987, my italics) notes: clearly, the home economics faced a challenge because professions were upgrading themselves by excluding amateurs, by defining themselves as 'manly' in a variety of ways, and by emphasizing the abstract over the concrete. In their discipline were to be a profession at all, they would do best to emulate existing male professions. The most important step was to distance themselves from that *lowly amateur*, the *housewife* (my italics).

The progressive intervention of the home economists on traditional household chores was result of Taylorism applied to the house universe. Thus "if [Frederick] Taylor hammered away at the intelligence and judgment of Schmidt, the pig-iron handler he was retraining, the home economics frequently did the same to the housewife" (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5]. Helen Campbell, a prominent name of the American Home Economics at that time, was also a Taylorist professional. She strongly criticized the skills of average American housewives. For her, woman should assume the progressive spirit and represent it in the space of the home. On the issue of food preparation, Campbell wrote sometime: there are many of these domestic industries still almost as rude and primitive as in the beginning (...) even the intelligent housekeeper still talks about 'luck with her sponge cake!' Luck! There is no such word in science, and to make sponge cake is a scientific process! (in MATTHEWS, 1987) [5].

<sup>1</sup>ALDERMAN, Katharine. "Expressing our Philosophy". AMERICAN HOME ECONOMICS ASSOCIATION. *Journal of Home Economics*. V. 40, Number 1. Washington, 1948, p. 1. Albert R. Mann Library. 2013. Home Economics Archive: Research, Tradition and History (HEARTH). Ithaca, NY: Albert R. Mann Library, Cornell University. Available in: <http://hearth.library.cornell.edu/h/hearth/>. Access 08/30/2013.

<sup>2</sup>My free translation from the original in Portuguese: "acreditava que uma dona-de-casa armada de conhecimento científico poderia eliminar a monotonia do fazer doméstico e realizá-lo com o prazer e a inteligência de um experimento".

In France, while it was creating a bourgeois "big kitchen", "masculine, sugary and greasy, asserting its wealth through a break with the traditional rusticity, women used to cook the provincial recipes slowly" (PERROT 2001, 205) [7]. Then, French chefs scoff at them, accusing them of being conservative. Thus, this kitchens conflict, so to speak, take on this interesting kind of social, cultural, and gender process [3]. <sup>1</sup> In the USA, 19<sup>th</sup> century home economists would also attack traditional ways of cooking by housewives. For Campbell, American chefs brought science to the kitchen. It was necessary for the women to follow them.

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the administration of the family budget, which had already become the pivot of a new political economy, including women as the "mistress of home" under the aegis of domestic science, would join efforts with the using of electricity to make "domestic arts" a rational field. This process made housewife "a kind of engineer, commanding the machines of a factory-kitchen" (PERROT, 2001, p. 179) [7].<sup>2</sup>

#### IV

##### New times and new challenges

The war atmosphere of the 1910s gave a new impulse to the consolidation of the domestic sciences in America. Official pamphlets, published by Agriculture Department, used to call young girls to rational and careful consume of food, water and clothes. Saving sugar and controlling amounts of food prepared for each meal had become common behavior at home. The government used to appeal in many opportunities to the population asking they chose foods

<sup>1</sup>My free translation from the Portuguese version of Perrot's book: "masculina, açucarada e gordurosa, ciosa em afirmar pela sua riqueza a ruptura com o rústico, as mulheres cozem lentamente as receitas provincianas" (PERROT, 2001, p. 205).

<sup>2</sup>My free translation from the Portuguese version of Perrot's book: "uma espécie de engenheira, comandando as máquinas de uma cozinha-fábrica" (PERROT, 2001, p. 178-179).

better, encouraging diets of corn and cereals instead of wheat for example.

There was an intention to boycott English products. Promoting consumption of national products was a protectionist practice, naturally expected from a government in times of scarcity. Indeed, this allowed the success of the process which had already begun by domestic economists during the century before. Thus, rationalizing consumption, storage and the preparation of food at home had become a national project and a social agenda, so to speak, formalized by the State. The importance and recognition of the Home Economics was growing.

Joan Jacobs Brumberg (1997) affirms that Home Economists in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America had a major role in the Progressive Era, the development of the welfare state, the triumph of modern hygiene and scientific medicine, the application of scientific research in a number of industries, and the popularization of important research on child development, family health, and family economics [8].

According to Matthews, however, the evolution of the domestic machinery, which overcame the traditional dynamics of houseworks, has created precedents for a crisis of feminine identity, putting in doubt its morals and its place in the world. The devaluation of domesticity was the major cause of this process. She remembers, for example, literature constructed a bad image of woman at that time. The novels and dramas featured in the American books and stages used to explore an idea of woman as despicable. The female characters were the object of their own contempt.

But, after all, what was happening? The diffusion of scientific thought applied to the domestic environment created at first a hollowing out of the traditional housewife, since it was started to combat individual taste and common sense. Thus, “millions of women war workers had less time than ever before

<sup>3</sup>My free translation from the Portuguese version of Perrot's book: “masculina, açucarada e gordurosa, ciosa em afirmar pela sua riqueza a ruptura com o rústico, as mulheres cozem lentamente as receitas provincianas” (PERROT, 2001, p. 205).

<sup>4</sup>My free translation from the Portuguese version of Perrot's book: “uma espécie de engenheira, comandando as máquinas de uma cozinha-fábrica” (PERROT, 2001, p. 178-179).

for preparing meals. In consequence, the war's legacy to the American palate was cake mix – and other types of processed foods that were closer to being ready-to-eat than anything else” (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5].

Carla Pinsky, Brazilian researcher, studying the 1950s, pointed out housewives should embody and perform a social label created on them and expected of them by the social culture of their time. The social destine of woman was

marriage and motherhood. Those who would not accept this “career” would be considered “denatured”, an “anomaly” (PINSKY, 2012) [9]. According to Pinsky, they were the decades of the “rigid models” of woman. Matthews also remembers “the wife who would not accept [her condition of housewife and mother] was, by implication if not by explicit charge, a bitch”.

In America, market created an ideal woman for consumption, for home and for marriage. That was the woman identity drama which Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name” in the 1960s. The restlessness and unhappiness of American woman studied by Friedan in *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) was one of the elements to be considered about psychosomatic health of woman from that on.

Once again Matthews observes “the American home at mid-century, cut loose from social, religious, or political moorings, was sacred only to ‘Family Togetherness’” (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5]. In consequence, “the housewife who was the chief votary of this cult was supposed to eradicate any vestige of personal ambition or independent thought in order to keep her family happy” (MATTHEWS, 1987) [5].

The following decades, coming to our days, were times of changing. Society started to discuss happiness and welfare. Freedom and citizenship also became more common issues among people of many ages. The globalization made international social conflicts and its conquests in terms of rights more visible. There are still inequalities of course, but the reality of western culture is changing. In my view, women (and men), people themselves, they have got more possibilities to take different professional opportunities and to choose different ways of life. I am not talking that everyone is able to do this. Of course, economy, authority and even moral still might be impediments to the individual desire but, in general, people are less passive of being judged by the society as they would be in other epochs.

## V

### Final considerations

Home economics was (and still has been) a field of actuation of woman (and currently of male professionals too) whose the great goal is the development of people. Thus, although it was born in the 19<sup>th</sup> century among a culture of sexism and gender social roles, its main issue was always linked to humankind and its improvement rather than to women or men in particular. The focus of domestic sciences was since the beginning family, human development, caring, rising and education of children.

To Matthews, however, as we noticed above, the fall of domesticity and the devaluation of housewife were a bad result of the advances of home economics and society itself. To others, on the other hand, this process was good to

improve houseworks and to rationalize the behavior of housewives (RUTHERFORD, 2003) [10]. Friedan, focusing a different issue, understood it like part of a culture of consumption which makes women unhappy.

I consider it is pretty important we realize that social division of labor and construction of senses which organizing our social coexistence they involve power and submission. Historically, devaluation of home and houseworks in favor to overvaluing factory (sphere of production) was a capitalist strategy for making available the progress of science just to the universe of accumulation of wealth from the exploration of labor. Thus, woman became synonymous of domesticity and they both became synonymous of inferiority.

It was a historical process of dilapidation of domestic issues and of woman herself. Home economics seems to me it was a chance to change this reality, spite Matthews' respectable conclusions. The stigmatizing of private sphere in relation to public is still alive in our culture [11]. Due this, sometimes home economics needed to be discussed as a filed and even replace its name eliminating the expressions "home" or "domestic". Some authors believe increasing interest of male students in home economics might be a way to eliminate the shame of domestic into the superior course of domestic sciences, private universe (AZUBUIKE, 2012) [12]. In America, for example, some universities, as Ohio, they changed the name from home economics to human ecology. In Brazil, we can find a pretty similar reality. From my doctorate studies about Department of Home Economics of Viçosa University, in Minas Gerais State, I could realize that both students and some professors are agreed to change the name of the course, although it has not been done yet (SIMAO, 2015) [13].

Despite of it, home economics created a great opportunity to the insertion of woman at public sphere by her own efforts. As Margaret Rossiter noted sometime, home economics "(...) was the only field where a woman scientist could hope to be a full professor, department, chairman, or even a dean in the 1920s or 1930s" (apud MATTHEWS, 1987) [5]. The proposal of coeducation brought by the land-grant colleges since 19th was the first step for that. Although at that time the tasks and functions were rigorously defined by gender, I do not agree our society still believe woman had been born for the domestic issues. Of course that is a discourse of power, in Foucault's expression, which was historically able to exclude woman from public sphere. However, considering that, nowadays, domestic sciences, as well as health, nutrition and caring are respected fields of science intervention where both men and women have been graduating and working, I am convinced that at least in part that stigma is overcome [14]. I believe we all, as a society, have to comprehend home and family like realities whose maintenance and success are responsibility of us all. I even dare to state that, after years of visible progress of

technology, humans are clearly lacking for development of themselves both physically and psychologically which highlights the subjects studied by care sciences and humanities in general. A double and new challenge for us contemporaries.

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